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Who Is Bronson Gurney?

THE CURIOUS MYSTERY THAT PUZZLED THE TOWN
OF FAIRPORT

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I HAD always expected that I, Eliza Carter of Bainbridge, a staid, middle-aged New England woman, would pass the remaining years of my life without any greater excitement than not having enough money to live on; but it proved otherwise.

It was on one of those sunny September days with a touch of the first fall tang in the air that I saw Arthur Rice, the village constable, drive into the yard. He came right into the sitting room, and with the important air to which his office entitled him he told me that he understood I was on the lookout for a position as housekeeper. He wanted to know if he was right. I told him that he was, and asked him if he knew of anything.

"Well, yes, I do," he said.

Then he went on to tell me about the Gurney place over at Fairport, the next town. In the old days, before Bainbridge had a high school, the boys and girls used to

go over to the Fairport Academy; and so, though Fairport has always had an atmosphere of aristocracy about it which Bainbridge never even aspired to, there has been a good deal of connection between the two towns. Arthur Rice himself went over to the academy for two winters.

He went on to tell me that as the Fairport Inn had burned down the year before, there wasn't any place for summer boarders, and the Fairport people liked to have those who had been coming year after year keep up the habit. He said that one of the trustees of the Gurney estate had informed him, that afternoon, that they had decided to rent the old Gurney mansion for that purpose, if they could find the right person to take charge of it. There were, he said, two or three people—a doctor, a teacher, and perhaps a minister—who wanted board all the year round; and the trustees had decided to give the house,

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rent free, from September to June, for the sake of having the right person there for the summer.

"They asked me," said Arthur, "if I knew the right person, and I said I did. I told them it was Miss Eliza Carter of Bainbridge. I said enough to make them want you. Now the question is whether you want to try your hand at running the Gurney place. I believe you'd make a success of it, Miss Carter."

I told him that at any rate I would look at the house and talk with the trustees. The result of that look and talk was that two weeks later, on the 21st of September, I was established in the Gurney mansion, with a wholly new view from my living room windows. In place of the peaceful Bainbridge meadows, I looked out on the great sea as it rolled up on the beach.

I shall never forget how that sea roared and pounded on the night when I was waiting for the doctor to come home; but I mustn't get ahead of my story.

My fall and winter household proved to be a small one. As the minister had decided to have his mother come and keep house for him, I had only the doctor, and a teacher at the academy. Dr. Thorn was a well-mannered man, about thirty or thirty-five, who had come to town highly recommended by a certain hospital board in Chicago, to take the place of the old doctor who had recently died.

Then there was Sylvia Brewster. What shall I say of her? The least I can say is that she had been appointed assistant in the Fairport Academy, and had come to the Gurney house to board. That doesn't give any idea of her. Even that first afternoon I knew there was something about her that was different from other girls.

Mrs. Chester Peabody, my first caller, told me that Sylvia had temperament. Perhaps that was it. Perhaps it was that which made people want to be where she was, even if she was only mending her dress. Perhaps it was that which made me feel that, try as I would, there would always be something about Sylvia Brewster that I couldn't fathom, any more than I could fathom the mystery of the sea.

Perhaps that was why Dr. Thorn—but I mustn't begin about Sylvia Brewster, or there'll be no stopping. I don't know what it is, but as long as she is anywhere about one can't help talking and thinking about her.

After supper that first evening, when my two boarders were both out, and I was alone in that handsome, high-studded living room, wishing I was back in Bainbridge and reading the *Chesterfield Chronicle*, I had a call from Mrs. Chester Peabody, my nearest neighbor. She apologized for coming so soon; but she said that her family had lived next to the Gurney house for more than a hundred years, that she had been Mrs. Richard Gurney's intimate friend, and had always felt a deep interest in anything that happened to the house or family. Now, after the house had been closed so long, she was so much interested in having it opened that she wanted to come right over.

From what she said and the way she said it, I judged that she was one of Fairport's best. Indeed, she somehow gave me the impression that it was the Gurney house and family that she had come over to see, and not the new boarding house keeper; but I was feeling so lonely that I was glad enough to see her.

Though her manners were more elaborate than those of the Bainbridge people, that didn't trouble me in the least. She had evidently received the idea that I was quite an estimable person, for she was very pleasant and sociable, and quite ready to talk about the Gurney family.

It came out that the house had been built more than a hundred years before, and had always been in the possession of the Gurneys. The last owner, Richard Gurney, had died nearly fifteen years before, leaving a curious will. His only son, Bronson Gurney, had left home when he was eighteen years old, and had never been heard from since. According to the conditions of his father's will, in case this son came back within twenty years, all the property—which was a handsome one—was to go to him; but at the end of fifteen years, in case Bronson Gurney had not been heard from, the property was to go to an old second cousin, Jaquith Gurney, who was now living in Fairport.

Bronson Gurney had never reappeared, and the handsomely furnished Gurney house had been accumulating dust and cobwebs for nearly fifteen years, until the burning of the village inn had made the trustees, acting with the consent of Jaquith Gurney, decided to renovate the place for occupancy.

Then Mrs. Peabody told me about the

day when Bronson Gurney went away. Since the death of her husband, she had often consulted the elder Mr. Gurney on business. One afternoon she had come to see him for that purpose, and was waiting in the long drawing-room on the south side of the house. As she sat there, she heard loud voices in the library, and later she heard Bronson Gurney go up to his room, then come down again and go out by the front door. Soon Mr. Richard Gurney came in and carefully and patiently advised her about her business difficulty.

Bronson Gurney never came back. She thought that without doubt he must be dead. His father, she said, had always been a reserved man, and he became more silent after his son's disappearance. She had never heard him speak Bronson's name.

In a year or two now, she explained, the property would go to Jaquith Gurney, an old bachelor, the most penurious man in Fairport, who lived like a hermit over in the south part of the town, seeing almost no one except his old deaf housekeeper.

Mrs. Peabody also told me something of my present household. She said that though the Fairport people thought that no one could ever take the old doctor's place, yet they were coming to think that Dr. Thorn was skillful, even if he was less sociable than they would have liked.

She told me about Sylvia Brewster, too. Sylvia's father was the son of the Congregational minister, who had come of a long line of ministers; but this son was different, and had gone to Virginia and married a beautiful Virginia girl. When Sylvia was five, her father and mother had both been killed in a railroad accident, and little Sylvia had come to live in Fairport with the old minister and his wife. Now they were both dead, and she was left alone. Then it was that she explained to me that Sylvia, like her Virginia mother, had temperament.

I felt a warm wave of gratitude go out to Mrs. Chester Peabody, as she talked to me in her interesting, gracious way, instead of treating me like a boarding house keeper. Though she left not the slightest impression of gossip, but rather one of great dignity and good breeding, I felt, when she left me, not only fairly well acquainted with my household, but also with many people in Fairport.

That night, after I had gone upstairs and turned out my light, I looked out on the sea. I remember that I had watched it in

the afternoon, when it danced on the beach, and some children were frolicking beside it with their dog, laughing at the waves. I had thought then how playful the sea was—always ready for a frolic; but now, as I looked out, it seemed dark and forbidding, and the great waves pounded on the shore as if there were no such thing as play on the earth.

As I watched it, a desolate feeling came over me, and I wondered if I should ever grow to like that great, strange sea. With my eyes still upon it, I wondered what my life was to be. I had no notion of the strange mystery in which I was to be caught up—a mystery which seemed at times as enshrouding as that of the sea itself.

I sat by the window until I saw Sylvia Brewster's light go out; then I crept off to bed. In the middle of the night I waked up to hear the waves still lashing against the rocks.

II

If I thought the sea was wild that first night at the Gurney house, what did I think of it on the evening of the 3rd of October?

It had been a sunny, mild day, almost as warm as summer; but about sunset the wind changed, and there swooped down on us such a storm as Sylvia Brewster told me they often had in October. Sylvia—I call her that now in speaking of her, though at that time I always called her Miss Brewster—had gone up to her room. She had been sitting by the big, open fire in the living room, weaving a raffia basket, while I knitted on an afghan.

As we were working together, it occurred to me that there was as much difference between Sylvia and me as there was between the pieces of work we were doing. I could knit the stripes for an afghan, one after another, according to rule, and when it was done my afghan would look as it should, and just like a hundred others; but I never could have acquired the knack of doing Sylvia Brewster's work. With her many different colors of raffia, she was weaving in a design which she was making up as she went along. She said that it was an autumn basket, that she was making it represent the woods in the fall, and she showed me gorgeous masses of crimson and yellow, with glimpses of green and touches of ash color very suggestive of dead leaves.

As she spoke about the woods in autumn, and as I watched her fingers weaving the

colors in and out, she made me feel, for a minute, as if I were in the woods on an October day. I wonder why she gave me that sensation!

I suppose that is what Mrs. Chester Peabody meant by saying that she has temperament. I haven't a bit of it—only common sense. Temperament is a good deal more interesting. If I come back to the earth again, as some believe that we shall, I hope that next time I shall have temperament—the Sylvia Brewster kind.

Finally Sylvia said that she was going upstairs. She looked pale in the firelight, and I imagined that she had had a hard day at school. There are plenty of big boys in the academy this winter, and I understand that Sylvia isn't anything very tremendous in the matter of discipline. For my part, I should think she'd have about as much discipline as one of those summer butterflies with variegated wings.

But perhaps it wasn't because she was tired that she had gone upstairs. In the ten days that I had been at the Gurney house, all of Sylvia's calls on me had been brief. Aside from the time given to meals, I had seen about as much of her as I had of a humming bird that flits over the geranium bed now and then. She was off walking with the principal of the academy, or on the river, rowing with one of the boys from school, or gathering flowers with the botany class, or—it would take too long to tell the variety of things that Sylvia did!

Dr. Thorn was less sociable than she, if possible, for I didn't even see him regularly at mealtime. He had not only all the Fairport practice, but he was often called over to Bainbridge, and the long distances kept him driving a great deal of the time. That night, I remember he had gone to Bainbridge to see a patient—Arthur Rice's newest baby, who had been taken with an attack of croup.

So, though I tried to make the great old house cheerful and attractive, we weren't a very sociable household. My boarders always seemed to be away somewhere, leaving me alone in that big living room, listening to the wind and the sea.

How it roared that night! As I glanced through the window, and caught a view of the tossing whitecaps, I couldn't help thinking of a row of lean, hungry wolves with flashing white teeth. I have never given myself time for useless imaginings, but I realized that I was pretty near to finding

out what nerves were that night. So I made haste to pile some more wood on the fire—the light kind that makes a great blaze—and, picking up my afghan again, I began counting stitches and knitting strenuously.

By the time I reached the end of my row, I had decided that I shouldn't have minded the lack of sociability in the house if the townspeople had been more neighborly. Though I had been in Fairport ten days, nobody at all, with the exception of Mrs. Chester Peabody, had even stepped in to say "How do you do?" to me.

Perhaps they felt a little timid about making advances in the case of a boarding house keeper, until they knew more about her family. I thought it might be a good plan to hang up Great-Grandfather Carter's Revolutionary sword, and the musket of that old ancestor of the French and Indian Wars, somewhere about the house.

But my more tolerant neighbor, Mrs. Chester Peabody, still seemed to think well of me, and made up, in a measure, for the general lack of friendliness. She seemed really happy to have me in charge of the old house; and, thanks to her, after being in Fairport ten days, I felt that I knew more about the dead and gone Gurneys than about any one else in town.

She had spoken that day, in a dreamy, reminiscent mood, of the night when Bronson Gurney left home, and had told me how one of the servants heard his father walking the floor till past one o'clock. She seemed to feel quite sure that he never wrote to his father, or to any of the townspeople. Every one thought he must be dead.

As I sat by the fire and thought of the boy who had hurried away that night so long ago, I realized that the wind was rising to a savage force, and that a terrific tide was battering against the shore. I remember, in a momentary lull, the thought came to me that my wolves of the sea were holding their breath now, all ready to make another plunge.

Then there was a step on the piazza, which I thought was Dr. Thorn's; but instead of the sound of his latchkey, for which I was waiting, I heard the old iron knocker drop and reverberate until it echoed through the house. I jumped up nervously from my chair. What was it that made me hesitate about going to the door? I thought of calling Sylvia Brewster. Then, ashamed

of my weakness, I walked out into the hall and pulled the big door open.

Some one immediately stepped into the hall. It was a young man, tallish and well knit, and he laughed as he brushed the spray of the sea from his face, declaring almost joyously:

"Well, this is a storm!"

Then he stood looking intently at me, without saying another word. I remember I noticed what blue eyes he had.

"I am a stranger here," I said, feeling that some one must speak. "I have been here less than two weeks. I do not know you. What is your business?"

You could have knocked me down with a feather when he looked more intently at me with those eager, blue eyes, and said:

"I'm Bronson Gurney. I've come home!"

III

THE next morning I awoke with the feeling of something unusual hanging over me. Then there came a quick memory of the evening before—*Sylvia Brewster's* autumn basket, the storm, and out of the storm—*Bronson Gurney*.

I remembered how he had sat by the fire explaining much that was not very intelligible to me, and how *Sylvia* had come down after the raffia she had left. She had on a loose, shimmery gown that somehow made me think of the sea. I didn't wonder that *Bronson Gurney* looked a little startled. Perhaps he thought she was a mermaid looking in at the door.

As I explained to each who the other was, I noticed how commonplace my voice sounded—just as if it was an everyday matter for a young man to pop into his house for an evening, after being gone fifteen or twenty years. No matter how wrought up I may feel, I'll wager that my voice always sounds matter-of-fact. That's why they always speak of me as being cool-headed, I suppose. It's a reputation I don't deserve. No intoxicated person ever felt giddier than I did that evening. I still had the feeling that I was in a dream, when, after *Sylvia* had gone, I showed *Bronson Gurney* to his old room with the same blue paper on the walls that he had told me about—and left him there alone.

I suppose it was because I felt so dazed that I had such a strange dream that night. I seemed to be out on the sea in a storm. I was all alone in a little boat, and the

great waves rolled up over its sides. There were ever so many other little boats tossing about in the water, too. In one was the man whom I had just been talking with—*Bronson Gurney*. He was on his hands and knees, bailing out the water, which was threatening to sink his boat. In another was *Sylvia*, with her goldy yellow hair falling down distractedly, and all wet. Suddenly she turned to me, calling out:

"Look! There's help coming!"

I looked where she pointed, and saw another boat coming toward us. In it was a man pulling with strong, steady strokes. A great sense of relief came over me, for I felt that we should all be saved. I turned to see his face, and just then I woke up.

Then it was that I remembered the strange happenings of the evening before. I felt indeed as if I were on a strange sea. However, I knew that though *Bronson Gurney* wasn't drowning, he probably was hungry, and that I must attend to breakfast.

Just then I glanced out through my window, and down there, close by the water, I could see him walking on the sand. He held his hand up to his eyes occasionally, looking away off to sea. There was no mistaking that tall, swinging figure. He might have been up for hours, and no doubt he was as hungry as a bear.

As a general thing I am not a particularly rapid person, but if there is one thing that I can do more quickly than another it is to get a meal. It was hardly half an hour before I had him sitting at the breakfast table, with a light ham omelet, pop-over cakes, and coffee before him.

I had no more than taken my place behind the coffeepot when *Mary Andrews*, my household assistant, came in from the kitchen and told me that *Arthur Rice* wanted to see me. Yes, it was *Arthur* who started all the trouble—but I mustn't get ahead of my story.

I found he had told the doctor, the night before, that he would stop in on his way to the *Fairport* stores, where he was taking some squashes, to let him know how the baby was. I believe I was never gladder to see any one than I was to see *Arthur* that morning. He gave me the feeling that I was on solid ground once more.

He had hardly finished telling me that the baby was getting on finely when I gasped out:

"*Arthur*, did you ever know *Bronson Gurney*?"

"Know him?" said Arthur. "I should think I did! I knew him like my own brother. We were in the same class at the academy."

"Well, he's come home," I said.

"Come home!" gasped Arthur. "What do you mean? Where is he?"

"In there," said I, pointing to the dining room door.

Arthur certainly did look overcome, though all he said was:

"I swan! You don't mean it!"

I told him that I did, and said that I'd go in and ask Bronson if he wouldn't like a friendly call.

Young Gurney was just finishing his second pop-over when I said:

"There's an old friend of yours in the kitchen. Would you like to see him?"

He looked up quickly.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"Arthur Rice," I said. "Do you remember him?"

His face lit up with real pleasure.

"Remember Arthur? Well, rather," he said. "Ask him to come right in."

As Arthur entered the dining room, it was hard to tell which was the more cordial. They shook hands, calling each other by their first names, and Arthur slapped his old friend on the back and got in another "I swan."

Then Bronson asked Arthur to sit down and have some breakfast; but Arthur thought he couldn't, as he had to get right along with his squashes. I was a little relieved at that, for although Arthur is one of my best friends, I had happened to sit next to him one night at a church supper, and I knew that he labored under a few disadvantages at the table. I remembered how he poured his tea into his saucer, and what an important part his knife played; and though Bronson Gurney had a hearty manner, I was quite sure that his table manners were as immaculate as his finger nails.

Besides this, the doctor and Sylvia Brewster would be coming down, and, not knowing all Arthur's good traits, they might not appreciate him. So I was a little relieved that his squashes were calling him.

After some exchanges of reminiscences, in which Bronson Gurney progressed to the point of calling his old friend "Art," Arthur went away to spread the news, more bubbling over with importance than I had ever seen him. I should not have been in

the least surprised if he had put on his constable's badge before night.

Just as he went, Dr. Thorn came in.

"Dr. Thorn," I said, "this is Bronson Gurney."

The doctor looked at Bronson with such a blank stare that I remembered that he was a newcomer, and had probably never heard the name. Even when I explained the matter, he didn't look much more intelligent, but muttered something about being glad to make Gurney's acquaintance, and went on eating his breakfast with that far-away look which I have learned usually means a case. So I made haste to give him Arthur's message about the baby.

Just then there was a flash of blue, and Sylvia Brewster came in and slipped into her seat at the table. Both men stopped eating and looked at her. She was well worth it, in that embroidered blue linen of hers, with her goldy hair in a Psyche knot.

Bronson Gurney laughingly said something about her being a very old friend, as he distinctly remembered her when she was five years old. I glanced at Dr. Thorn then, and saw that his case expression was gone. On his well-bred face there was something very like a stare. Altogether the meal was a rather awkward one, and I was glad when it was over.

Just as we were rising from the table, the doorbell rang. That was the beginning. It rang all day. In all the time that I had been in Fairport, no one but Mrs. Chester Peabody had been to see me; but Arthur had evidently spread his news like wildfire, and the friends of the Gurney family showed no backwardness about welcoming the prodigal son.

It happened that Mrs. Chester Peabody had gone to visit some friends in Philadelphia early that morning, so I didn't have the pleasure of seeing her welcome to Bronson Gurney; but all the others were cordiality itself. They were different from the Bainbridge people, and yet—but I won't stop to tell about the Fairport people now, for I must hurry on to Arthur and the trouble he started.

He was so eager to tell his news to everybody that when he reached old Jaquith Gurney's place in South Fairport, that evening, he must get out and bang away on the knocker till he got the old man to the door. If Arthur had had a grain of sense, it would have occurred to him that Jaquith wouldn't be overjoyed to hear that some

one had come to take the Gurney property; but in some ways the constable is like a child. He seemed to think that Jaquith would be as much pleased as any one.

He said the old man's hand shook like a leaf when he told him. I don't know how he ever persuaded Jaquith, who is such a recluse, but he told him that he was going to drive right by the Gurney place, and that he would take him there and bring him back, allowing him time to give a friendly greeting to his cousin. I rather imagine that Jaquith demurred somewhat, but Arthur had quite a way with him, and he finally persuaded the old man.

It was about eight o'clock in the evening when the front doorbell rang, and I went to the door and let them in. I remember how feeble Jaquith looked, but Arthur was radiant. And though people had been coming, off and on, all day, it happened that there was no one in the living room just then but Bronson Gurney and myself.

As I showed the two into the room, Arthur said solemnly:

"Bronson, I've brought you over your Cousin Jaquith to see you."

Bronson Gurney rose. As I looked at him, so tall and straight, and then at the little bent-over old man, with his coat collar pulled up round his ears, I couldn't help thinking that there was very little resemblance between the two cousins. But Bronson put out his hand quickly and said:

"Yes, I wanted to see Cousin Jaquith right off. Blood is thicker than water, and now we're the only Gurneys in town."

The little bent-over man looked sharply into the young fellow's face and listened intently to him. Then he said in a high, quavering voice:

"You're not Bronson Gurney. Blood is thicker than water! You haven't a drop of Gurney blood in your body. I'll stick to that. Arthur, drive me home!"

IV

WHEN Jaquith Gurney made this astonishing statement, I rather think that Arthur Rice repented of being so anxious to bring the old man over to greet his cousin. His repudiation of young Gurney took the wind out of Arthur's sails completely.

The constable's jaw actually seemed to drop. I heard him tell some one the next day that it made him as mad as a hornet; but I will say that I never saw so discouraged-looking a hornet as Arthur was. He

hardly seemed to have the life to take the old man home. I don't believe either of them spoke a word on the way.

As for Bronson Gurney, I hardly had time to see how he took it, for just as Arthur started off there was a knock at the door. I opened it, and a well-dressed woman stood there, explaining that she was Mrs. Wentworth, Tom Wentworth's mother. It seemed that Tom had gone off canoeing with his teacher, Sylvia Brewster, right after school, and had not come home. She said she always worried when he went off to the river in his canoe, it was so unsteady; and she asked us if Miss Brewster had come home.

Then it was that Bronson Gurney claimed our notice. I had hardly explained that Sylvia had not returned when he said:

"I'll go and look them up."

Without stopping for a hat, he rushed down to the shore, jumped into the boat, and headed for the river. As we looked out into the moonlight, we could see him rowing with long, strong strokes.

He told us afterward what had happened. It was as Mrs. Wentworth had feared. The unstable canoe had capsized where the river was broadest, and quite a distance from land. Wentworth, who could swim, had managed to keep Sylvia from sinking, and had reached the overturned canoe; but they were too far from shore to consider reaching it, and he couldn't leave Sylvia long enough to right the overturned canoe. So there they were, clinging to it, almost exhausted, when Bronson Gurney found them.

Mrs. Wentworth and I were keeping up the fire, and waiting for anything that might come, when I heard the boat grate on the sand. There was young Wentworth pulling in the boat, and Bronson Gurney was stepping out with something in his arms. As he came leaping toward the house, it is curious how my mind behaved. Anxious as I was, I couldn't help thinking how much he reminded me of a picture in my copy of Longfellow's poems, representing a Norseman coming up from the sea and carrying a maiden in his arms. The human mind is an uncertain thing, and mine was still out of bounds, so to speak, when the Norseman dashed into the room and laid the unconscious Sylvia on the sofa. As good luck would have it, at that very moment, when we were all wondering what was to be done next, I heard Dr. Thorn drive up. I never was gladder to hear any footstep than the

sound of his horse's hoofs. I hurried to the door and said:

"Dr. Thorn, come in here right away, please!"

He tied a knot in the halter with one quick motion, and, with his medicine case in his hand, followed me in. He took command of the situation at once. It was only two or three minutes before he had brought Sylvia out of her faint. Then he had us all waiting on him—me heating hot water, Bronson Gurney getting brandy, and young Wentworth running for blankets.

"Miss Brewster must be taken to her room," he told us, a few minutes later. "If you'll lead the way, Miss Carter, I think I can manage it."

He was so tall and muscular that Sylvia's weight was nothing to him, I suppose. He seemed to carry her over that long, old-fashioned oak staircase as easily as if she had been a piece of seaweed.

When he had her safely deposited in her own room, he said that there was nothing more that he could do, that she would be all right in the morning, and that the sooner she got to sleep the better. Then he left us as abruptly as he had come in.

Half an hour later, when I went down to the living room, Mrs. Wentworth and Tom had gone home, and the two men were sitting looking into the fire, saying nothing at all. When I told them that Sylvia was asleep, the doctor made a move to go.

Then it was that Bronson Gurney said, with a queer gulp in his voice:

"This has been a strange day, but it has come out all right, after all. Doesn't it seem like a nightmare, though, to think of that little old man, Cousin Jaquith, standing up and denying me?"

He turned quickly to Dr. Thorn.

"Doctor," he said, "Cousin Jaquith says I'm not Bronson Gurney. What do you think of that?"

The doctor looked coolly at him for a minute. Then, in such deliberate tones that each word seemed a blow aimed between the eyes, he replied:

"Since you press me for an opinion, sir, I will say that I quite agree with Jaquith Gurney. Good night!"

And he was gone.

I saw Bronson quiver as the blow struck him. Then he flushed, and said with a half laugh:

"I'm beginning to wonder if I'm myself! What do you think, Miss Carter?"

I didn't know how much I believed in him till I heard my own voice saying:

"Whatever any one else may say, I believe in you, Bronson Gurney!"

"Thank you, Miss Carter," he answered quietly.

Then we sat by the fire, in a queer silence, until finally he broke out again.

"Do you know," he said, "when I was trying to get Miss Brewster into the boat, it seemed to me that the power of the deep was holding her and would never let her go! I felt as if she belonged to the sea."

We looked into the fire again. Then he started up and said with a laugh:

"My Cousin Jaquith's a queer old duffer, isn't he? Good night, Miss Carter."

And he was gone, too.

I sat up a little while longer to compose my mind after this discomposing day. Dr. Thorn stopped on his way in, when his horse had been properly quartered for the night.

"Miss Carter," he said, standing in the doorway, "please never allow Miss Brewster to go out in a canoe again. It's not safe."

When I assured him that I had no authority over Miss Brewster, and that nothing I could say would influence her, he said briefly:

"Oh, very well! I will tell her, then."

His tone gave me the impression that Sylvia Brewster would not go out in a canoe again; and to my knowledge she never did.

V

If Arthur Rice spread his first news like wildfire, he was evidently just as prompt about reporting that last speech of Jaquith Gurney's. Though it had made Arthur's jaw drop, I knew him well enough to appreciate that, with him, news was news. He must have got his latest piece well started before he reached home that night. At any rate, next morning the whole town knew it.

If the bell on the front door and the knocker on the side door had been kept going pretty steadily the day before, it was nothing to the calls we had now. The people whom Bronson Gurney had already met—and it was surprising how many he had managed to get around to see—were amazed and thoroughly aroused. With one voice they all condemned Jaquith Gurney.

The old man had never had any real

friends in town. For years he had lived alone with his deaf housekeeper, and had seen almost no one; but he was a Gurney. Although he had always been tight-fisted and sharp at a bargain, they had regarded him like the rest of the Gurneys, now dead and gone, as strictly honest. Now they were ready to believe the worst of him, and to conclude that the prospect of losing the Richard Gurney property, when almost in his grasp, had overcome all feelings but greed.

It was late in the afternoon, when I happened to be alone, that the old knocker claimed my attention in a way that was entirely new. Instead of its usual announcement of one bold stroke, there were three little quavering knocks in quick succession. It sounded something like a bird's beak striking against the door, and it brought me to my feet with a start.

When I opened the door, there stood Jaquith Gurney with a big book under his arm. He bowed and said, with a touch of old-fashioned courtesy:

"With your permission, madam, I will walk in. I am Jaquith Gurney."

When I asked him to be seated, he first carefully deposited his book on the table near him. Then I saw that it was an old family Bible. He looked so weak, and his hand trembled so, that I asked him if I couldn't make him a cup of tea.

"I thank you, madam, but it is not necessary," he replied. "Is"—he hesitated for a minute—"is the gentleman who claims to be Bronson Gurney in this house? If so, I would thank you to call him."

When I told the old man that Bronson had gone to the post office, but that I expected him back any minute, he said:

"Then, with your permission, madam, I will wait for him."

"I am sure Mr. Bronson Gurney—" I began.

Jaquith interrupted me by hitting the floor testily with his cane.

"Do not call him by that name, madam," he said. "He has no claim to it. All the Gurneys in this town, except me, are in the graveyard. I am the only Gurney here." He pointed to a portrait of Richard Gurney, on the wall. "If Bronson Gurney's father could speak he'd say the same. Mark my words!"

He stopped for a minute, looking at the portrait of Richard Gurney, and thumping his cane on the floor.

"That fellow last night said that blood is thicker than water," he went on. "He was right there—it is, and I came over here to give the hand of welcome to one of my own kin. I may have lived alone a good while, but I have my wits still, and let me tell you that my scent for the Gurney blood is keen. That fellow is one of your poetry-spouting, soft-pated weaklings. There never was a Gurney like him—not in face, or voice, or brains. They have always been hard-headed men, who knew the value of a dollar and the value of a man. Believe me, madam, I'm the last one of my blood in Fairport!"

His hands trembled so, as he spoke these last words, that I was afraid that he would join his ancestors before my eyes. The old man had evidently walked over from the south part of the village, where he lived, and a three-mile walk for a man of his years and strength was no light task, especially with that heavy Bible to carry.

I don't know whether I was glad or sorry when the door opened and Bronson Gurney came in. For just a minute he stared blankly at the old man. Then he held out his hand and said:

"Glad to see you, Cousin Jaquith!"

"Don't 'Cousin Jaquith' me!" replied the old man grimly. "Sit down, young man. I have some questions to ask you."

As I was leaving the room, he said:

"Madam, will you do me the favor to remain as a witness? At the death of Richard Gurney the family Bible came to me." He opened the book. "Please stand beside me, madam, and verify this."

So I watched his quivering finger go up and down the columns where the births and deaths of the Gurney family were recorded. He had a pencil and paper, and as Bronson Gurney made his answers he would write down his replies in somewhat this way:

Claimant says Sophia Gurney died about 1880. Claimant says Thomas Gurney was Richard Gurney's own cousin.

Each time he showed me the record he had made. There was no doubt, if these old Bible records were correct, that Bronson got the race of Gurneys badly mixed. There was hardly a branch of the family that was not pretty well twisted in his hands.

On consideration, however, it seemed to me that he remembered about as much concerning the births and deaths and relation-

ships of his various relatives as any man would, who had had no connection with them since he was a boy of eighteen. When I thought it over, I concluded that he knew almost as much about the Gurneys as I did of the Carters who had died before I was that age.

Jaquith did not regard the matter with any such tolerance. After he had finally finished his questioning, which had extracted both groans and laughs from Bronson—who, I will say, had kept perfectly good-natured through the long succession of queries aimed at him like bullets—the old man sat down. He had labeled his record of Bronson's replies, "Statements Made by the Claimant." He now made a copy of this document. Then he handed me the two papers, and asked me if they were entirely similar.

When I told him that one was an exact copy of the other, he said:

"Then, madam, I will ask you to have the goodness to keep this copy. We may need it."

As I did not see my way clear to refusing his request, I took charge of one of the documents written in Jaquith's small, shaky handwriting.

Bronson courteously waited till the old man had finished his writing and had given it to me. Then he spoke.

"Of course," he said, "there is a great deal that I don't remember about dates and relationships. Nobody could get them all right. I don't believe you could yourself, Cousin Jaquith."

"Try me," said Jaquith grimly.

"Very well," said Bronson.

So he opened the Bible and put question after question to the old man, who answered each one without a moment's hesitation. As I followed name after name, I could not detect the slightest error. Finally he was asked in what year one Abijah Gurney was born.

"In 1822," he replied promptly.

"Wrong!" said Bronson. "It was in 1823"—pointing out the date to me.

"It was in 1822, wasn't it, madam?" asked Jaquith testily, tapping the floor with his cane.

I told him that the record gave the date as 1823.

"Well, the record's wrong, then," he declared.

"You've done mighty well, anyhow," said Bronson. "Of course, I got a whole lot of

things twisted. You must remember that I was only eighteen when I went away. I've forgotten ever so many things; but I remember a lot, too, as all the people I have talked to will tell you."

Jaquith had no reply to make to this. As his business was done, the old man made a move to get his hat.

"Let me row you over, Cousin Jaquith," suggested Bronson.

"No, I thank you, sir," replied Jaquith.

Just then I heard Dr. Thorn coming downstairs. I did hate to have that weak little old man travel those long three miles again, so I called out:

"Dr. Thorn, are you going over to South Fairport? If you are, can't you take Mr. Jaquith Gurney home?"

Dr. Thorn looked surprised to see the old man, but assured him that he was going to pass his house, and would be glad to take him in.

"I thank you, sir," replied Jaquith, "but I will walk. Madam, the records have the wrong date for Abijah Gurney's birth. Good day!"

He went off, with the big book under his arm. I watched the bent old man trudging along the road till he was out of sight, family Bible and all. Then I went to my room and locked up the closely written document in my writing desk, devoutly hoping that I should never have occasion to produce it.

When I came back, Bronson Gurney was still standing by the window, waiting to see the little figure emerge from the clump of pines that hid it.

"Poor old duffer!" he said. "It's too far for him to walk. He hasn't the strength of a fly. Why wouldn't he let me row him over?"

He seemed more troubled over this than over the poor examination that he had passed in Bible history; but after a few minutes he was in his usual good spirits again.

Then Sylvia Brewster came in, and we all three stood by the window, watching the big, black clouds gather, and the white-caps roll in upon the beach. Another October gale seemed to be coming down on us.

Bronson insisted on bringing in a big basket of driftwood, while Sylvia brought down her mandolin. Then Bronson sang to her accompaniment, or to a kind of accompaniment that he picked out himself. Most of his songs were songs of the sea.

After a time he put down the mandolin, and while Sylvia worked on her raffia basket and I knitted on my afghan, he read us parts of "The Tempest" from an old volume that had been in the bookcase for years.

I look back now with a strange feeling of pleasure to that pleasant afternoon by the fire, when we three, with our own cheer, shut out the storm and Jaquith Gurney and all trouble. We were as happy as children all the evening, though of course I realized that my own part in creating the happiness was a small one.

Only once was there anything like a shadow among us. It was when suddenly, without any warning, except a scratch on the glass, a little bird from the sea came darting through the open window. I suppose the warm air and the fire frightened it, for after wheeling about in distracted circles for a few moments, it dashed against the wall in a desperate attempt to find the window again. Then the wheeling circles began again just over Bronson Gurney's head, until, with a bold dash, the bird landed on a bracket in the corner of the room, where it sat mournfully beating its wings.

We looked at it rather helplessly. Then Bronson stepped up on the sofa, just beneath it, and slowly brought himself up to his full height. Very quietly he raised his arms till his hands were close to the frightened little creature, when with a quick motion he brought them together, the bird between them. With two light steps he reached the window, and the bird was gone again—into the darkness.

I never thought I was superstitious, but that bird, flying into the midst of our cheer, did give me an uncomfortable feeling for a minute. Sylvia gave a little shiver.

"They say it's bad luck to have a bird fly into the house," she said.

I told them that that was all nonsense, and went out for some coffee, which I brought in in the thinnest of the old-fashioned Gurney cups. This led Bronson Gurney to take up the mandolin and begin singing "Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes," in his high tenor. While he was singing, I noticed that he looked at Sylvia Brewster more than he did at me; but with this exception he was just as attentive to me as he was to her, and the evening went on. The problem of having a cheerful living room had certainly been solved since Bronson came.

About ten o'clock we were interrupted by the doctor's latchkey. He came in bringing mail, and I mentioned that I was sorry to have old Mr. Gurney walk so far.

"I overtook him and made him get in with me," said the doctor briefly.

Dr. Thorn certainly does have a way of making people do what he wants. I was glad if, for once, Jaquith Gurney had met his match.

In the night I waked up, and it came to me why Dr. Thorn had evidently taken such a dislike to Bronson Gurney.

VI

It wasn't long before Jaquith Gurney's position became pretty well known, and then it was that some of the solid business men of the town advised Bronson to take the case to law at once. They said that there might be trouble if the trustees, acting in accordance with his father's will, should hand over the property to him in the face of Jaquith Gurney's opposition; that they, as individuals, ought not to take the responsibility of doing it, but that he ought to submit the question of his identity to law at once. With the decision of the courts behind him, he could come into his rights without any uneasiness about old Jaquith Gurney.

Bronson himself was so easy-going about the matter that at first it didn't seem as if he would ever take so decided a step as to make a court case of his birthright; but his friends reasoned with him. Finally they brought him to see the wisdom of the step, and to recognize that it would simply mean taking a little trouble now to save himself possible annoyance later.

I remember what consultations there were about the matter, and how this and that legal opinion was given, until finally it was decided that the thing to do was to have a preliminary injunction hearing, which could be held immediately. If the judge conducting the court should decide in Bronson's favor, it would mean that the decision would prevent the property from being handed over to Jaquith Gurney.

And so it came about that on the morning of November 15, at ten o'clock, I, with many other Fairport people, was seated in the county courthouse at Chesterfield. I had come alone. Sylvia Brewster had regretted that her work prevented her being there, but there was no doubt that she was very much interested in the case. Arthur

Rice was there, sitting with the witnesses, full of bustle and good spirits.

Before the session began I asked Arthur if he thought there was any doubt about the outcome.

"Not a mite," he returned cheerfully. "Bronson Gurney's goin' to have the keys to the Gurney house before he's much older, and don't you forget it. Don't you worry none, Miss Carter," he hastened to add. "He tells me he means to keep you there to run things just the same."

Bronson had already told me that, so I hadn't any anxiety on that score. What worried me was to see Jaquith Gurney coming in with the old family Bible under his arm.

Judge Lawton had promised that it would be a short case, and it was. First Bronson Gurney was called, and was questioned for nearly an hour. Many things he did not remember, but there was so much that he did, and his evidence was given so frankly, that I am sure he must have gained over to his side any who had not seen him before. The judge listened very intently, and I felt confident that he was convinced.

The other witnesses were then put through their testimony in short order. Many former acquaintances of Bronson testified to the accuracy with which he had answered questions about his early life. Arthur Rice was among them. His only trouble was that he wanted to tell too much. He would have talked all day if the lawyers had let him. Arthur never does show off to the best advantage on the witness stand.

Then there were friends of the family who testified. Mrs. Chester Peabody had been summoned, and had come home the night before. Bronson had been over to call on her in the evening.

I could not but admire the ease and dignity of Mrs. Chester Peabody. Probably she had never been in a court room before, but she took her place in the witness box as easily as if she had been pouring afternoon tea. She told about her close relations with the Gurney family, and although she admitted that she had never seen very much of the claimant, she said that he answered such questions as she put to him so well, in the main, that she believed him to be Bronson Gurney.

The testimony was all of much the same nature, but it was pretty well agreed that for the first eighteen years of his life Bron-

son Gurney had been a quiet, reserved boy—diffident, some called him—and that there were few people who knew him well. Upon his return, he remembered so much connected with his school life, his family life, and the life of the town, that those who had talked with him were confident that he was the man he claimed to be.

And so it went on—cumulative evidence, they called it; and then there was a change, for the name of Jaquith Gurney was called. There was a hush of expectation as the little old man who was the cause of all the trouble rose from his seat among the witnesses, and took his place in the witness box. A wave of smothered indignation seemed to greet him as he stood there ready, as they believed, to deny his own blood.

The day before I had received a formal note, written in Jaquith's little cramped hand, asking me if I would bring my copy of his record to the courthouse. So, although I hated to do so, I had taken the document out of my writing desk, and I now had it in the little leather hand bag that I carried.

Though I could feel the sentiment of the court room, the witness did not seem aware of it—or, if he was, he refused to let it disturb him. I suppose he had lived apart from the people so long that he didn't think much about them—or perhaps he didn't care.

At any rate, he made a good witness. He was exact and concise in his testimony, and gave it with much dignity. When he brought out his copy of the "Statements Made by the Claimant," he explained about the copy that he had given to "one Miss Eliza Carter."

It gave me a queer feeling to hear my name called out in the court room; but I had my hand right on my little document. When I was asked if I could produce it, I quickly did so, after affirming that, to the best of my belief, it was the paper that Jaquith Gurney had given me under the circumstances he described. I was glad enough to get it out of my possession and to hand it over to the judge for examination, along with the family Bible.

Altogether, though I was sorry to have Jaquith give his testimony against the "claimant," as he called him, I could not help feeling some respect for an old man who, with the feeling of the courthouse manifestly against him, could testify in so precise and accurate a way. Though he

admitted that he hardly knew Bronson Gurney before the young man left home, he stoutly affirmed that he knew the Gurneys, and that the claimant was no Gurney.

Jaquith Gurney's testimony closed the case. Then the lawyers spoke briefly.

Bronson had good legal aid. His lawyer was conclusive and sanguine. As Jaquith Gurney had engaged no counsel, apparently considering the old Bible quite enough, the court had appointed a lawyer to represent his interests.

Jaquith's counsel emphasized the fact that while almost no witness could be found who could affirm that he knew Bronson Gurney well before he went away from home, many were eager to testify regarding the claimant who had appeared.

"We are on sure ground only," he said, "when we base everything on that eighteen-year-old boy. *He* was Bronson Gurney. When we start for any other premise, however pleasing, we are fumbling in the dark."

Then he contrasted the eighteen-year-old Bronson Gurney, as he was known to be—shy, reserved, and chary of confidence—with the open, friendly, magnetic claimant, as he insisted on calling him. Just as if any boy of eighteen mightn't change as much in fifteen years! One of my sister's boys has changed completely in five.

The case had been put through quickly and satisfactorily. No one seemed to have the least doubt as to the outcome, the witnesses had been so many and so convincing. Jaquith's testimony was the only serious stumbling block; but any fair-minded man must admit that his own son couldn't make a much more creditable showing on family history, and I felt that no honest judge would let this stand in the way of giving Bronson Gurney his rights.

As I had to get back to Fairport for supper, I decided not to wait for the judge's decision. When I reached the Gurney house, Sylvia was waiting to hear an account of the day; and she regretted all the more, as I told her about it, that she hadn't had the fun of going.

Before I left the courthouse Bronson Gurney told me that he thought he would spend the night at Judge Caxton's. The judge, who had retired from active work, had been a great friend of Richard Gurney, and had made a good deal of Bronson since he came home.

Perhaps one reason Bronson liked to go over there was because the judge had a

young wife and some handsome daughters. At any rate, he was taking advantage of this last invitation, and I knew that we shouldn't have the opportunity of congratulating him that night.

I hoped that Dr. Thorn would bring us some news, because he had told me that he would try to be present to hear Judge Stone's decision. We sat up late, but he did not come. Concluding that he had been called out on a case, we went to bed feeling little doubt that Bronson had won.

The next morning, while I was getting breakfast, Arthur Rice drove into the yard. He didn't stop to hitch his horse. In fact, he hardly stopped to knock.

"Well," he said, "I suppose you've heard the news?"

"What news?" said I, wondering what news there could be to hear.

"The judge decided against Bronson," he replied. "He said that from the evidence given he thought there was room for reasonable doubt regarding the identity of the claimant. As the property wouldn't go to Jaquith Gurney for about a year, Bronson Gurney—providing he is what he claims to be—would have plenty of chance to prove it before that time; but the court refused to keep the property away from Jaquith by preliminary injunction."

I hoped Arthur understood about this preliminary injunction better than I did. At any rate, we both understood only too well that Bronson had lost his case.

VII

JUST after Arthur went out, I heard the doctor come down into the dining room. Of course, I had wanted to see him the night before, when I thought that Bronson had won his case; but now that I knew he had lost, I should have been quite as glad not to meet Dr. Thorn.

Although I said nothing about it, and tried not to think about it, I knew that Dr. Thorn did not like Bronson Gurney; so this morning I made up my mind that I would say nothing at all, at the breakfast table, about the case. That would be easy, and the doctor himself would probably be quite as well satisfied. Occasionally an expression crossed his face that made me wonder if he didn't think me just a little too talkative, and perhaps a little in danger of not knowing my place.

To be sure, this had never troubled me in the least. When I went into the business

of earning my own living, I made up my mind that nothing would ever make me give up my self-respect, or my independence of mind and action; and nothing will. For all that, I didn't think it was my duty to discuss the judge's decision with Dr. Thorn, as he sat there eating his beefsteak and rolls.

He had been up all night, and he said that he would try to sleep for an hour or two after breakfast. He must start out again at ten, though, and he asked me if I would be good enough not to let him sleep later than that. Aside from that, there was no conversation except little remarks about the serving of his coffee or steak; but he was not destined to get through his breakfast without realizing the sentiment in the Gurney house. When Sylvia Brewster came into the room in her gayest mood, she said, as she sat down:

"Well, I suppose we are all rejoicing this morning!"

"About what?" asked Dr. Thorn, looking up quickly.

"About Mr. Gurney's victory in court," she replied.

I hastened to explain that Judge Stone had decided against Bronson.

"Against him!" cried Sylvia, aghast. Then, as if not believing me, she turned incredulously to Dr. Thorn and said: "Is that true?"

"The claimant did not win his case," replied the doctor.

I had not discovered before that Sylvia Brewster had a temper of her own, but now I couldn't help recalling her Virginia blood as she retorted:

"The claimant! What a name to call him by! What do you, a newcomer at Fairport, know about him or his family?"

Dr. Thorn did not answer her question. Instead, he asked her politely if she had been at the hearing.

"Though I was not present at the examination," she said, "I heard the whole account of it from Miss Carter. Considering the testimony, I don't see how any person with a particle of judgment could fail to be convinced of the justice of Mr. Gurney's claim. They ought to prevent judges without any sense from serving on such cases!"

Dr. Thorn then said, rather dryly, that it wasn't possible to form an opinion without having heard the testimony for oneself.

Sylvia turned to me.

"You heard the whole testimony, Miss Carter. What did you think of it?"

I thought Sylvia was doing pretty well without my help, and I should have really preferred not to be drawn into the discussion. Being appealed to, however, the best I could do was to say that it appeared to me that the testimony all went one way, with the exception of that which Jaquith Gurney offered; and it did not seem to me that his evidence had any real value.

Perhaps, after all, I had been mistaken in thinking that Dr. Thorn considered me too talkative. At any rate, he listened to me attentively, and when I had finished, he said respectfully:

"I do not agree with you, Miss Carter, regarding the value of Jaquith Gurney's testimony. In all that jumbled mass of hearsay and supposition, his evidence stood out clear and untouched. What he said meant something. I gathered, from what I heard, that there were very few people in the town who knew young Gurney well when he went away. He seems to have been a quiet chap, who kept pretty much to himself. His only intimate friend, it appears from the testimony, was Robert Kendall, and he is dead. All the testimony that those people gave yesterday amounted to practically nothing. It was not about the Bronson Gurney who went away, but about this claimant."

That word started Sylvia again. She didn't allow the doctor to go any further, but retorted sharply:

"I remember Bronson Gurney before he went away!"

Dr. Thorn looked a little surprised.

"You will pardon me," he said, "for suggesting that it is possible that you had not reached an age of discretion when he left home."

As if Sylvia Brewster would ever reach anything so commonplace as that!

"Though I was only five years old when he left home," she replied, "my memory of people whom I saw in childhood is very keen. I remember perfectly how he used to take the books around in Sunday school, with the other boys of his class. He used to come to our class often, and I remember it perfectly, I tell you."

Dr. Thorn looked quite interested.

"And are you convinced that this is the man?" he inquired.

"Yes," she said earnestly. "I would be willing to take an oath to that effect."

When Dr. Thorn said that unfortunately such testimony would not be accepted in court, Sylvia retorted by saying:

"It's a miserable law, anyway, that allows the judgment of one stubborn man, incapable of being convinced, to overturn the opinion of the whole town—or, at least, of every one in town whose judgment is worth anything!"

When Dr. Thorn, in quite an impersonal way, made a brief defense of the system which placed so much responsibility on a judge, Sylvia gave him but scant attention. In fact, we both continued to eat our breakfast in disapproving silence; but I fear that our dignity was all wasted on Dr. Thorn. When he was leaving the table, for his short rest and sleep, he turned to us quite casually.

"If you ladies will excuse me," he said, "I would rather not discuss the Gurney case in the future."

As if we had not been trying for the last ten minutes to show him that nothing would entice us ever to give him one word on the subject again! The denseness of some men does seem very surprising.

In the middle of the afternoon Bronson Gurney came home. I was prepared to find him entirely discouraged; but I was surprised there, too. I heard some one whistling "Bonnie Doon," and then Bronson Gurney was standing before me in the living room, looking as if he was in the best of spirits. He explained to me that the Caxtons had kept him over there all day.

I tried to tell him how sorry I was about the examination.

"Oh, don't let that bother you," he said. "The only testimony against me was that of that old simpleton who has more property than he knows how to use now!"

That little burst of petulance against Jaquith Gurney was the only sign of ill temper that he showed concerning the outcome of the case. He seemed more interested in telling us what they had done for him over at Judge Caxton's than in discussing his future fortunes, though he did ask me if Sylvia Brewster knew the result, and what she had said about it.

I told him that she was very sorry, but said nothing about her conversation at the breakfast table with Dr. Thorn. As long as we four people were to live under the same roof, I had made up my mind that morning that we must have as much peace

as was in any way possible. I was determined that in the future I would not say one word that would tend to make any more ill feeling on the part of any of the three. There hardly bid fair to be too much harmony, at best.

Though Bronson Gurney took Judge Stone's decision so calmly, it was not so with the Fairport people in general. That evening the feeling of the town found expression in the pouring out of a large delegation of people who came up to the Gurney house to express their indignation. They came in such numbers that I could hardly find seats for them in the living room, and before long they had overflowed into the library. It was surprising how many friends he had made.

I should say that most of the prominent people in town were there. Judge Caxton came, with his wife and one daughter. Mrs. Chester Peabody was there, though she said that on account of the Gurney excitement she had hardly had time for a minute's rest since she came back from Philadelphia. She certainly did look tired out.

Arthur Rice heard of the gathering as he was driving home, and he dropped in about nine o'clock. Both old and young were there, and it was not only a large but an enthusiastic gathering. They all told Bronson that he must push his application right through, regardless of the decision. Judge Caxton explained that, owing to certain legal requirements, it would be impossible to present the case again before the spring session, but that there ought to be no difficulty in having his identity settled at that time, even if Jaquith Gurney persisted in his folly.

About half past nine Dr. Thorn dropped into the living room, with the evening mail in his hand. He seemed surprised to see such a company of people, said "Good evening" to the room as a whole, left the mail in its customary place, and then excused himself, murmuring something about "not stopping to-night."

I don't believe any one wanted him to stop. Somewhat to my regret, Sylvia had spoken of his attitude; and if he had been a man who noticed such things, he might have felt that the atmosphere was not especially cordial. Mrs. Chester Peabody's lorgnette and Judge Caxton's dry cough, not to speak of Arthur Rice's vacant stare, would have disturbed a sensitive person, I am sure. To such a one, too, I am afraid

that the flash from Sylvia Brewster's eyes might have proved dangerous.

It was not much later that the meeting broke up, after I, at Bronson's suggestion, had regaled our friendly visitors with hot chocolate. When they had all gone, I realized that there was no doubt that the town of Fairport was ready to stand by Bronson Gurney. Eventually we should triumph over Jaquith and the other obstinate people; but it seemed so long to wait for the convening of the court in the spring.

As things came out, however, we did not have to wait.

VIII

THE day after the meeting at the Gurney house was Saturday, the day the gypsies came to Fairport. They usually came through early in the fall, Sylvia said. They were late this year.

It was one of those mild, sunny days that sometimes come in Indian summer, and the air was as soft as June. I thought it must be rather pleasant to move about through the country in such lovely weather. Sylvia said the carts looked so inviting that she thought of joining the tribe.

When I went down the street to do my marketing that morning, I saw black-haired girls with bright-colored shawls along the way, who smiled brightly as they offered baskets for sale. I also heard of several small thefts which had been committed the night before, for which every one said they were accountable. They seemed to be free and easy people, for I was told that if their knocks received no answers, they walked calmly in and offered their wares.

That afternoon Bronson Gurney, Sylvia, and I were in the living room—Bronson suggesting a row on the river, and Sylvia wondering whether she ought to go upstairs and change her skirt—when we heard a soft voice saying:

"Tell fine fortunes for you, my ladies?"

Standing in the doorway was an old gypsy woman with a red and yellow handkerchief wound around her head and partially covering her black hair, which was plentifully streaked with gray.

Remembering the stories that I heard in the morning, I was about to tell her that we wanted nothing that she had to offer, when Sylvia broke out with—

"Oh, let's have our fortunes told!"

I hardly approved of this, but I didn't like to seem notional, so I said nothing.

The old woman came in, muttering unintelligibly as she helped herself to a chair.

"I must tell all," she said. "All—oldest first, youngest last—all, or no good!"

So they persuaded me to offer my palm for her examination first. She might have observed that the most noticeable thing about it was that I had done a good deal of hard work lately; but she didn't say anything of the kind. It was all much more interesting, but now I can remember only two things that she told me.

One was that it was my fate to be connected with great events—"of life and death," she said—to be in them but not of them. She also told me that I belonged to the land and the sun. Some, she said, belonged to the sea, some to the land, some to the sun, some to the moon, and some to the stars. I was glad that I was to stay on dry land. I saw all I wanted to of that strange sea from my windows.

When she looked at Bronson Gurney's hand, which she insisted on reading next, she said that he was of the sea and the stars. It was his fate always to go from place to place, never to stay. She certainly made him out a rover, stopping here and there, but never for long.

"Over the sea you go," she said; "on and on to the stars, for you were born at high tide."

Sylvia's hand bothered her a little. She was not so glib about that. Sylvia was part of the land, part of the sea, she said, part of the moon, part of the stars. She said the sea called her, but there were other voices—voices calling everywhere. She made out that all these different voices and variations in her destiny were due to the fact that she was born on the seventh day of the wane of the moon, and at the ebb of the tide. It seemed that that was enough to account for anything.

I was glad to know what it was that made Sylvia seem different. As the old gypsy was getting everything all straightened out, I couldn't help wishing that she had had Dr. Thorn's hand to read. I would have liked to know the cause of his peculiarities, too.

When she had predicted either great joy or great sorrow for Sylvia, a million tears or a million candles of delight, she suddenly stopped and said that she could tell no more, that a crisis was at hand, and that all was confusion until it had passed. Then she rose to go.

Perhaps it was the extra silver piece that Bronson Gurney gave her that made her decide she would give us our money's worth; or perhaps it was a wild gypsy inspiration that moved her to stop on the way to the door and tell a fortune for the house.

It seemed, according to her, that every house has a spirit. The spirit of the Gurney house, she said, was a bird—a bird from the sea. As she said that this bird came before a birth or a death, or any event of importance to the family, I couldn't help recalling the little frightened creature that came darting through the window that afternoon soon after Bronson Gurney's arrival. I wondered if he and Sylvia thought of it.

"Things come and things go," said the old woman. "There is a death and there is a birth, but the end of this family is not yet. The light of the house has flickered feebly, but it will flame up again and go on." She turned to Sylvia. "Remember that, my fair lady!"

"But I am not part of this house," said Sylvia.

Nevertheless, the queer old creature repeated it over again:

"Remember that, my fair lady!"

Then she curtsied low, and, making a sign of blessing to the house, she was gone.

Bronson and Sylvia, hurrying to make up for lost time in the lovely sunshine, immediately started off on their boating expedition, taking sandwiches and fruit with them, so that they could stay out late and row home by moonlight.

But there was no temptation to remain on the water that night. At sundown the usual mildness of the day left us, and it suddenly blew up cold. The clouds were so heavy, too, that there wasn't a sign of moonlight; and Bronson and Sylvia were glad to hurry home to the warmth and comfort of a wood fire.

When I spoke of the sudden change in the weather, Sylvia said:

"The trouble is that it's the wane of the moon and the ebb of the tide. That accounts for any misfortune. It probably accounts for me!"

"Remember that, my fair lady!" said Bronson, laughing.

Just then our gracious neighbor, Mrs. Peabody, came in. She said that she had been resting all the afternoon, and had decided that she must have some society. She is fond of playing bridge, and between

them they taught me the game. They assured me that I did very well for a beginner, and we four had a pleasant evening together.

Mrs. Peabody seemed to be quite fond of Sylvia, and she also took a great interest in Bronson Gurney. Once during the game she said:

"There, when you turn your face that way, you look just as you did when you were eighteen. I really think it's surprising that you haven't changed more in so long a time!"

"Cousin Jaquith thinks I have," said Bronson.

Just then Sylvia made it "no trumps," and there was no further mention of Jaquith Gurney, who always seemed to throw a dark shadow across our cheerful living room.

It was dark and cold when Mrs. Peabody was ready to go home, and the wind was making a dreary sound, blowing the dead leaves about outside. Down by the ledge, close by the water, we could see the light of the gypsies' camp fire, and could hear loud outcries. They were certainly noisy people.

Bronson insisted on going home with Mrs. Peabody. Sylvia did not wait till he came back, but went right up to her room.

The wind and waves made so much noise that it was the middle of the night before I slept. I had hardly lost myself when I was awakened by a tap on the door. Who could be wanting me at this time of night? Well, with two men in the house, there was no cause for fear. Hastily putting on my wrapper and slippers, I threw open the door.

There stood Sylvia Brewster, looking pale and strange in her long blue robe.

"Oh, Miss Carter!" she said. "The spirit of the house is pecking against my window pane!"

"Nonsense!" said I. "Spirits can't peck."

"It has been knocking and knocking to come in," she said.

Just then I heard Dr. Thorn's latchkey. I thought that such a matter-of-fact man as he would think us crazy if he heard us talking about the spirit of the house at that time of night; so I hurried in to Sylvia's room with her.

Sure enough, as I entered, I heard what sounded like the beak of a bird against the window. When I turned on the gas, there

was a flutter of wings, and we heard nothing more. The bird had evidently flown away.

"I thought you said spirits couldn't peck!" said Sylvia.

"So I do," said I. "That wasn't a spirit pecking at the window. It was a bird's beak, and now the bird has gone. There is nothing strange about that."

Sylvia decided that I was right, and meekly apologized for having waked me.

Next morning she found the feather of a sea gull under her window. She told Bronson Gurney that the spirit of the house had dropped it.

"The spirit of this house evidently has a message for you," said Bronson.

"I wonder what it was!" said Sylvia.

"Wait and see," said Bronson.

IX

I CANNOT put it off any longer. I have come to another part of my story. It would be much easier if I could go on about the gypsies, and the birds from the sea, and the shadow of Jaquith Gurney. One can get along very well, as long as one has only shadows to deal with; but I have never been able to believe, as a certain number of people do, that the only things that are real are the pleasant ones.

I consider that hard times are just as real as easy times. Instead of denying them, I believe that we have got to do our best when we come up against them; and I imagine that it is just as well that it is so. I'm sure that I, for one, would never have developed at all if I had just had to sit in an easy chair all my days, saying how beautiful everything was. I don't believe it would have been very interesting, either. I have a notion that it wasn't any mistake when big things like life and death and sin and sorrow were brought into this world.

On my afghan ever so many shades are needed to make the design come out right. When I work in a black bit, I know that when the pattern is done I shall see that it was just as necessary as the red and yellow bits that I like so much better. Some lives seem to come out fairly well all done in bright colors, but mine wasn't designed that way at the start.

As yet, however, I have never let the trouble come very near me—the real me. Perhaps that is what the gypsy fortune teller meant when she said that I was to be in strange things, but not of them.

And here I am, as silly as the worst of those who recognize only the comfortable events! I would like to shirk the difficult things, too. That is why I have been going on in this way, just to put off telling what happened next.

Let me go right on. I must begin with Sunday night—that Sunday night about which we heard so much afterward, the night of November 18. It was the day after the gypsies had told our fortunes, I remember, and an unusually mild day for November.

I happened, at the supper table that evening, to say that I had been told at church that Jaquith Gurney's deaf housekeeper had gone to visit her sister in Detroit. It was a month's vacation which she took every two years.

"Then the old man is all alone," said Bronson, when he heard this. "I believe I'll go over and make him a call, and see if we can't have a friendly chat. He's the only person in Fairport that stands in my way. I can't make matters any worse with him; and perhaps, when I tell him some things, he'll be convinced that I know who I am. He didn't give me half a chance the day he came here. If he'll stop looking over the pages of that plaguey old Bible long enough, I'll convince him!"

I had noticed the set of Jaquith's mouth, and I hadn't much faith that any one could change it; but I thought well of Bronson for being so forgiving, after Jaquith's testimony at the examination, and I concluded that it wouldn't do him any harm to try to be friendly with his cousin. Perhaps, too, the old man might be lonely and glad to have a call. So, without misgivings, I watched Bronson Gurney bob off over the water in the boat that Sunday evening.

After he had gone, Sylvia Brewster and I went to the evening service at the Congregational church. I am a Unitarian, but there is no church of that faith in Fairport except for a few months in the summer, when some of the Boston people bring down their minister with them. I think Sylvia liked to go, out of respect to her grandfather, though she told me that her mother had been an Episcopalian. Moreover, those Sunday evening meetings at the Congregational church were quite popular. The minister was young, and he had drawn in a great many young people.

After the meeting, Tom Wentworth walked home with us. He sat in the gal-

lery that evening, and once, when I happened to glance up there, I noticed how intent his eyes were on Sylvia. She wasn't aware of it in the least, I am sure. The fact is that when Sylvia goes to church, there are a great many pairs of eyes on her—especially those of the academy boys.

After young Wentworth had gone, Sylvia said that it seemed a long fast until breakfast. We had just gone to the pantry, for raspberry shrub and cheese cakes, when I heard the doctor come in at the side door.

I sometimes felt a little sorry that, while we always took Bronson Gurney into whatever we happened to be doing, we treated Dr. Thorn like a stranger. As I was anxious to be friendly, I took pains to go out and meet the doctor that evening, and to ask him if he wouldn't have a little refreshment with us, too.

He thanked me politely, but said that he couldn't stop just then; and in a few minutes we heard him come down the stairs and go out again. Not long after that I went to bed, leaving a plate of cheese cakes where Bronson could find them when he came in.

The next morning, at breakfast, I asked him how he had found his Cousin Jaquith.

"Oh, the crazy old simpleton wouldn't even let me in," he said.

I saw that he preferred not to talk about his attempted visit. I could hardly wonder that he felt hurt; so I changed the subject, and told him about the poor family for whom the Congregational minister was trying to get help. Quite characteristically, Bronson was immediately interested, and pulled out a dollar bill, asking me to contribute it to the fund.

That same afternoon, I happened to say to Mrs. Chester Peabody that Bronson had made an unsuccessful attempt to see Jaquith Gurney. When she looked interested, I told her more about it. She was silent for a few minutes; then she said:

"I tell you what I believe I'll do—I'll go over and call on Jaquith Gurney. I haven't seen him to speak to for years, but I used to go to school with him, and I'm sure he would see me."

She went on to tell me that he was always a very quiet fellow in school, never even looking at a girl, if he could help it; but once, at the academy, they had been put on a debate together, and he had been obliged to consult with her a good deal at that time.

"I'll remind him how we worked to prove that the execution of Charles I was justifiable," she said. "I'm sure that I can persuade him to listen to the reason that I have for believing that Bronson Gurney has come home. In the first place, I'll tell him how much he looks as Bronson did."

I knew, from experience, that Jaquith was always most courteous to ladies, and I thought it a very good plan for Mrs. Peabody, with all her tact, to try to convince the obstinate old man.

She had no sooner made up her mind to go than she decided that there would be quite enough time to make the call before supper.

"I'll have William drive me right over," she said.

In less than quarter of an hour I saw her seated in her carriage, with William Hennessy, the man she has had in the family for years, driving her straight over to Jaquith Gurney's.

When she came back, Sylvia, Dr. Thorn, and I were eating supper. Bronson Gurney, I remember, was at the Caxtons'. She came into the dining room with a troubled face.

"Oh, Bronson isn't here, is he?" she began. "I stopped because I am a little perplexed. When we reached Jaquith's house, there was no one at home. I remembered several calls that I owed in South Fairport; so I decided to make them then, and to stop and see Jaquith on my way back. Though it was an hour later when I came back, there was still apparently no one at home. The front door was locked, but the curtains were up, and we could see into all the lower rooms. Jaquith never makes calls, and I can't imagine what could keep him away so long. I'm afraid he may be ill upstairs, and in need of assistance. Don't you think that some one ought to look into the matter, Dr. Thorn?"

I have noticed that though Mrs. Chester Peabody is so capable and self-reliant, when a man whom she thinks well of is at hand, she has a way of appealing to him for assistance or advice. Perhaps that is part of her tact.

Dr. Thorn, who had been perhaps a little abstracted up to this point, was all attention at once. With his alert and professional air, he said that he would drive over at once and investigate. He really seemed quite agitated, and I decided that he was

more kind-hearted than he gave evidence of. Perhaps it was only his professional helpfulness. At any rate, he hardly waited to finish supper, but went right upstairs to get his doctor's case.

When he came down, he stepped into the dining room.

(To be continued in the January number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

"There may be no cause for alarm," he said; "but there may be more in this than appears. In matters of this kind it is sometimes better to have a second person." Then, in a tone of authority, he added: "Miss Carter, I should like to have you go with me, if you will."

The Song Triumphant

THE STORY OF BEREL PINSKY, POET OF THE PEOPLE, WHO
SOLD HIS SOUL FOR WEALTH

By Anna Yoziorska

"WHERE went your week's wages?" demanded Hanneh Breineh, her bony back humping like an angry cat's as she bent over the washtub.

Terrified, Moisheh gazed wildly at the ceiling, then dropped his eyes to the floor.

"Your whole week's wages—where went it?" insisted Hanneh.

She turned from the tub and brandished her hands in his face.

"The shoes—Berel's shoes," Moisheh stumbingly explained. "I—I had to buy him shoes for his feet—not new shoes—only second-hand."

"Shoes yet for such a loafer? I'd drive him out naked—barefoot. Let him get the chills—the fever—only to get rid from him quick!"

None of the roomers of Hanneh Breineh's lodging house could escape her tyrannous inquisition. Had she not been a second mother to Moisheh, the pants presser, and to Berel, his younger brother? Did she not cook their supper for them every night, without any extra charge? In return for this motherly service she demanded a precise account of their expenditures of money or time, and of every little personal detail of their lives.

Red glints shot from Hanneh Breineh's sunken eyes.

"And for what more did you waste out my rent money?"

"Books—he got to have 'em—more'n eating—more'n life!"

"Got to have books?" she shrieked. "Beggars—*schnorrers*—their rent not paid—their clothes falling from them in rags—and yet they buy themselves books!" Viciously slapping the board with the shirt she had been rubbing, she straightened and faced Moisheh menacingly. "I been too good to you. I cooked and washed for you, and killed myself away to help you for nothing. So that's my thanks!"

The door opened. A lean youth with shining eyes and a disheveled mass of black hair rushed in.

"Ach, Moisheh! Already back from the shop? My good luck—I'm choking to tell you!"

The two drab figures huddled in the dim kitchen between the washtub and the stove gazed speechless at the boy. Even Hanneh Breineh was galvanized for the moment by the ecstatic, guileless face, the erect, live figure poised birdlike with desire.

"Oi, golden heart!" The boy grasped Moisheh's arm impetuously. "A type-writer! It's worth fifty dollars—maybe more yet—and I can get it for ten, if I grab it quick for cash!"

Moisheh glanced from the glowering landlady to his ardent brother. His gentle heart sank as he looked into Berel's face, with its undoubting confidence that so reasonable a want would not be denied him.

"Don't you think—maybe—ain't there something you could do to earn the money?"

"What more can I do than I'm already doing? You think only pressing pants is work?"

"Berel," said Moisheh, with frank downrightness, "you got your education. Why don't you take up a night school? They're looking for teachers."

"Me a teacher? Me in that treadmill of deadness? Why, the dullest hand in a shop got more chance to use his brains than a teacher in their schools!"

"Well, then, go to work in a shop—only half days—the rest of the time give yourself over to your dreams in the air."

"Brother, are you gone crazy?" Berel gesticulated wildly. "I should go into that terrible sweat and grind of the machines? All the fire that creates in me would die in a day!"

The poet looked at the toil-scarred face of his peasant brother. For all his crude attempts at sympathy, how could he, with the stink of steam soaked into his clothes, with his poverty-crushed, sweatshop mind—how could he understand the anguish of thwarted creation, of high-hearted hopes that died unvoiced?

"But everybody got to work," Moisheh went on. "All your poetry is grand, but it don't pay nothing."

"Is my heart cry nothing, then? Nothing to struggle by day and by night for the right word in this strange English, till I bleed away from the torture of thoughts that can't come out?"

Berel stopped, and his eyes seemed transfigured with an inner light. His voice grew low and tense. Each word came deliberately, with the precision he used when swayed by poetic feeling.

"Ach, if I could only tell you of the visions that come to me! They flash like burning rockets over the city by night. Lips, eyes, a smile—they whisper to me a thousand secrets. The feelings that leap in my heart are like rainbow-colored playthings. I toss them and wrestle with them; and yet I must harness them. Only then can they utter the truth, when they are clear and simple so that a young child could understand."

Turning swiftly, the words hissed from the poet's lips.

"Why do I have to bite the dirt for every little crumb you give me? I, who give my life, the beat of my heart, the blood of my veins, to bring beauty into the world—why do I have to beg—beg!"

He buried his face in his hands, utterly overcome.

Moisheh, with an accusing glance at Hanneh Breineh, as if she was in some measure to blame for this painful outburst, soothed the trembling Berel as one would a child.

"Shah!" He took from his pocket all his money. "Two dollars is all I yet got left, and on this I must stick out till my wages next Monday. But here, Berel, take half."

Shamed by Moisheh's generosity, and embittered by the inadequacy of the sum, Berel's mood of passionate pleading gave way to sullenness.

"Keep it!" he flung over his shoulder, and left the room.

II

BEREL'S thoughts surged wildly as he raced through the streets.

"Why am I damned and despised by them all? What is my crime? That I can't compromise? That I fight with the last breath to do my work—the work for which I was born?"

Instinctively his feet led him to the public library, his one sanctuary of escape from the sordidness of the world. But now there seemed no peace for him even here.

"Money—money!" kept pounding and hammering in his ears. "Get money or be blotted out!"

A tap on his shoulder. Berel turned and looked into a genial face, sleeked and barbered into the latest mold of fashion.

"Jake Shapiro!" cried the poet.

Five years ago these two had met on the ship bound for America. What dreams they had dreamed together on that voyage—Berel Pinsky, the poet, and Shapiro, the musician!

"What are you doing for a living? Still writing poetry?" asked Shapiro, as he glanced appraisingly at the haggard-eyed youth. In one swift look he took in the shabby garments that covered the thin body, the pride and the eagerness of the pale, hungry face. "I guess," added the musician, "your poetry ain't a very paying proposition!"

Incensed at the unconscious gibe, Berel turned with a supercilious curl of his lips.

"What's a sport like you doing here in the library?"

Shapiro pointed to a big pile of books from the copyright office.

"Chasing song titles," he said. "I'm a melody writer. I got some wonderful tunes, and I thought I'd get a suggestion for a theme from these catalogues."

"*Oi weh*, if for ideas you have to go to copyright catalogues!"

"Man, you should see the bunch of lyric plumbers I have to work with. They give me jingles and rimes, but nothing with a real heart thrill." He turned on Berel with sudden interest. "Show us some of your soul stuff."

Berel handed several pages to the composer. One after another, Shapiro read.

"Highbrow—over the heads of the crowd," was his invariable comment.

Suddenly he stopped.

"By heck, there's a good idea for a sob song! What a title—'Aching Hearts'!" He grasped Berel's hand with genuine friendliness. "Your lines have the swing I've been looking for. Only a little more zip, a change here and there, and—"

"Change this?" Berel snatched the verses and put them back in his pocket. "There's my heart's blood in every letter of it!"

"Yes, it's heart stuff all right," placated the composer, realizing a good thing, and impatient as a hound on the scent. "Come along!" He took Berel by the arm. "I want to read your sob stuff to a little friend."

Flattered, but vaguely apprehensive, Berel followed Shapiro to the delectable locality known as Tin Pan Alley, and into the inner shrine of one of the many song houses to be found there.

"Maizie!" cried Shapiro to a vaudeville star who had been waiting none too patiently for his return. "I've found an honest-to-God poet!"

He introduced Berel, who blushed like a shy young girl.

"So you're a poet?" said Maizie.

Her eyes were pools of dancing lights as she laughed, aware of her effect on the transfixed youth. Berel stared in dazzled wonder at the sudden apparition of loveliness, of joy, of life. Soft, feminine perfume enveloped his senses. Like a narcotic, it stole over him. It was the first time he had ever been touched by the seductive lure of woman.

Shapiro sat down at a piano, and his hands brought from the tortured instrument a smashing medley of syncopated tunes.

"This needs lyric stuff with a heartbeat in it," he flung over his shoulder; "and you have just the dope."

His eyes met Maizie's significantly, and then veered almost imperceptibly in the direction of Berel.

"Go ahead, kid—vamp him! We've got to have him," was the message they conveyed to her.

Maizie put her hand prettily on the youth's arm.

"With an air like that, and the right lines—oh, boy, I'd flood Broadway with tears!"

Berel stood bewildered under the spell of her showy beauty. Unconsciously his hand went to his pocket, where lay his precious verses.

"I—I can't change my lines for the mob," he stammered.

But Maizie's little hand crept down his arm until it, too, reached his pocket, while her face was raised alluringly to his.

"Let's see it, Mr. Poet—do, please!"

Suddenly, with a triumphant ripple of laughter, she snatched the pages and glanced rapidly through the song. Then, with her highly manicured fingers, she grasped the lapels of Berel's coat, her eyes dancing with a coquettish little twinkle.

"It's wonderful!" she flattered. "Just give me the chance to put it over, and all the skirts from here to Denver will be singing it!"

Shapiro placed himself in front of Berel and said with businesslike directness:

"I'll advance you two hundred bucks on this song, if you'll put a kick in it."

Two hundred dollars! The suddenness of the overwhelming offer left Berel stunned and speechless.

"Money—*ach*, money! To get a breath of release from want!" he thought. "Just a few weeks away from Hanneh Breineh's cursing and swearing! A chance to be quiet and alone—a place where I can have a little beauty!"

Shapiro, through narrowed lids, watched the struggle that was going on in the boy. He called for his secretary.

"Write out a contract," he ordered. "Words by Berel Pinsky—my melody."

Then he turned to the poet, who stood nervously biting his lips.

"If this song goes over, it'll mean a big piece of change for you. You get a cent and a half on every copy. A hit sometimes goes a million copies. Figure it out for

yourself. I'm not counting the mechanical end of it—phonograph records—pianola rolls—hurdy-gurdies."

At the word "hurdy-gurdy" an aching fear shot through the poet's heart. His pale face grew paler as he met the smooth smile of the composer.

"Only to get a start," he told himself, strengthening his resolve to sell his poem with an equal resolve never to do so again.

"Well?" chuckled Shapiro.

He drew out a thick wallet from his pocket, and began counting out the fresh, green bills.

"I'll do it this once," said Berel, in a scarcely audible voice, as he pocketed the money.

"Gassed with gold!" exulted Shapiro to Maizie, after Berel left. "He's ours body and soul—bought and paid for!"

III

HANNEH BREINEH's lodging house was in a hubbub of excitement. A limousine had stopped before the dingy tenement, and Berel—a Berel from another world—stepped into the crowded kitchen.

How he was dressed! His suit was of the latest cut. The very quality of his necktie told of the last word in grooming. The ebony cane hanging on his arm raised him in the eyes of the admiring boarders to undreamed of heights of wealth.

There was a new look in his eyes—the look of the man who has arrived, and who knows that he has. Gone was the gloom of the insulted and the injured. Success had blotted out the ethereal, longing gaze of the hungry ghetto youth. Nevertheless, to a discerning eye, a lurking discontent, like a ghost at a feast, still cast its shadow on Berel's face.

"He's not happy. He's only putting on," thought Moisheh, casting sidelong glances at his brother.

"You got enough to eat, and it shows on you so quick," purred Hanneh Breineh, awed into ingratiating gentleness by Berel's new prosperity.

With a large-hearted gesture, Berel threw a handful of change into the air for the children. There was a wild scramble of tangled legs and arms, and then a rush to the street for the nearest pushcart.

"*Oi weh!*" Hanneh Breineh touched Berel with reverent gratitude. "Give a look only how he throws himself around with his money!"

Berel laughed gleefully, a warm glow coming to his heart at this bubbling appreciation of his generosity.

"Hanneh Breineh," he said, with an impressive note in his voice, "did you ever have a twenty-dollar gold piece in your hand?"

An intake of breath was the only answer.

"Here it is."

Berel took from his pocket a little satin case, and handed it to her, his face beaming with the lavishness of the gift.

Hanneh Breineh gazed at the gold piece, which glistened with unbelievable solidity before her enraptured eyes. Then she fell on Berel's neck.

"You diamond prince!" she gushed.

"Always I stood for your part when they all said you was crazy!"

The lean, hungry-faced boarders drank him in, envious worship in their eyes.

"Rockefeller—Vanderbilt!"

Exclamations of wonder and awe leaped from lip to lip, as they gazed at this Midas who was once a *schnorrer* in their midst.

Basking in their adulation like a bright lizard in the sun, Berel, with feigned indifference, lighted a thick cigar. He began to hum airily one of his latest successes.

"Ten thousand dollars for my last song!" he announced casually, as he puffed big rings of smoke to the ceiling.

"Riches rains on you!" Hanneh Breineh threw up her hands in an abandon of amazement. "Sing to me only that millionaires' song!"

Lifting her ragged skirts, she began to step in time to the tune that Berel hummed.

Out of all the acclaimers, Moisheh remained the only unresponsive figure in the room.

"Why your long face?" Hanneh Breineh shrieked. "What thunder fell on you?"

Moisheh shifted uncomfortably.

"I don't know what is with me the matter. I don't get no feelings from the words. It's only boom—boom—nothing!"

"Is ten thousand dollars nothing?" demanded the outraged Hanneh Breineh. "Are a million people crazy? All America sings his songs, and you turn up your nose on them. What do you know from life? You sweat from morning till night pressing out your heart's blood on your ironing board, and what do you get from it? A crooked back—a dried out herring face!"

"The prosperity of fools slayeth them," quoted Moisheh in Hebrew.

Berel turned swiftly on his brother.

"It's the poets who are slain and the fools who are exalted. Before, I used to spend three months polishing one little cry from the heart. Sometimes I sold it for five dollars, but most of the time I didn't. Now I shoot out a song in a day, and it nets me a fortune!"

"But I would better give you the blood from under my nails than you should sell yourself for dollars," replied Moisheh.

"Would you want me to come back to this hell of dirt and beg from you again for every galling bite of bread?" cried Berel, flaring into rage. "Your gall should burst, you dirt-eating muzhik!" he shouted with unreasoning fury, and fled headlong from the room.

This unaccountable anger from the new millionaire left all but Hanneh Breineh in a stupor of bewilderment.

"Muzhik! Are we all muzhiks, then?" she cried. A biting doubt of the generosity of her diamond prince rushed through her. "Twenty dollars only from so many thousands? What if he did dress out his stingy present in a satin box?"

She passed the gold piece around disdainfully.

"After all, I can't live on the shine from it. What 'll it buy me—only twenty dollars? I done enough for him when he was a starving beggar that he shouldn't be such a piker to me!"

IV

A NIGHT of carousing had just ended. Berel Pinsky looked about his studio. Wineglasses were strewn about. Hairpins and cigarette ashes littered the floor. A woman's rainbow-colored scarf, reeking with tobacco smoke and perfume, lay wantonly across the piano keys.

He strode to the window and raised the shade, but quickly pulled it down again. The sunlight hurt him. The innocent freshness of the morning blew accusingly against his hot brow.

He threw himself on the couch, but he could not rest. Like a distorted mirror, his mind reflected the happenings of the night before.

A table decked with flowers and glittering with silver and glass swam in vinous streaks of purple and amber. Berel saw white shoulders and sinuous arms—women's soft flesh against the black background of men's dress coats.

One mocking moment rose out of the reeling picture. A bright head pressed against his breast. His arms encircled a slender silken body. Pinnacled high above the devouring faces of his guests, hectic verses sputtered from his lips with automatic fluency.

It was this scene, spurting out of his blurred vision, that stabbed him like a hidden enemy within his soul. He had prostituted the divine in him for the swinish applause of the mob!

"God help me! God help me!" His body swayed back and forth in dumb, driven helplessness. "My sin!" he moaned, and sank to his knees.

Unconsciously he recalled the ritual chant of the Hebrews on the Day of Atonement—a chant he had not heard since he was a little child in Russia.

"My sin—the sin I committed willfully and the sin without will. Behold, I am like a vessel filled with shame and confusion!"

As he repeated the chant, beating his breast, his heart began to swell and heave with the old racial hunger for purging, for cleanness.

"My sin!" he cried. "I took my virgin gift of song and dragged it through the mud of Broadway!"

His turbulent penance burst into sobs—broke through the parched waste within him. From afar off a phrase fragrant as dew, but vague and formless, trembled before him. With a surge of joy, he seized pencil and paper. Only to catch and voice the first gush of his returning spirit!

"Wake up, you nut!"

Shapiro had come in unobserved, and stood before him like a grinning *Mephistopheles*. Berel looked up, startled. The air boiled before him.

"See here—we got the chance of our life!" Shapiro, in his enthusiasm, did not notice Berel's grim mood. He shook the poet by the shoulder. "Ten thousand bucks, and not a worry in your bean! Just sign your name to this."

With a shudder of shame, Berel glanced at the manuscript and flung it from him.

"Sign my name to this trash?"

"Huh! You're mighty squeamish all of a sudden!"

"I can't choke no more my conscience."

"Conscience, hell! If we can't get the dope from you, I tell you, we got to get it from somebody else till you get back on the job!"

A cloud seemed to thicken Berel's glance. "Here," he said, taking from his desk his last typewritten songs. "I've done my level best to grind this out."

Shapiro grasped the sheets with quickening interest. He read, and then shook his head with grieved finality.

"It's no use. It's not in you any more. You've lost the punch."

"You mean to tell me that my verses wouldn't go?"

Berel's eyes shone like hot coals out of his blanched face.

"Look here, old pal," replied Shapiro, with patronizing pity. "You've just gone dry."

"You bloody ghoul!" Berel lifted his fist threateningly. "It's you who worked me dry—made of my name nothing but a trade-mark!"

"So that's what I get for all I done for you!" Revulsion at the boy's ingratitude swept through Shapiro like a fury. "What do you think I am? Business is business. If you ain't got the dope no more, why, you ain't better than the bunch of plumbers that I chucked!"

With a guttural cry, Berel hurled himself forward like a tiger.

"You bloodsucker, you!"

A shriek from Maizie standing in the doorway. A whirling figure in chiffon and furs thrust itself between them, the impact pushing Shapiro back.

"Baby darling, you're killing me!" Soft arms clung about Berel's neck. "You don't want to hurt nobody—you know you don't—and you make me cry!"

Savagely Berel thrust the girl's head back and looked into her eyes. His face flashed with the shame of the betrayed manhood in him.

"I was a poet before you smothered my fire with your jazz!"

For an instant Maizie's features froze, terrified by an anger that she could not comprehend. Then she threw herself on his shoulder again.

"But it's in rehearsal—booked to the Coast. It's all up with me unless you sign!"

He felt her sobs pounding away his anger. A hated tenderness slowly displaced his fury. Unwillingly, his arms clasped her closer.

"This once, but never again," he breathed in her ear, as he crushed her to him.

Gently Maizie extricated herself, with a smile shining through her tear-daubed face.

"You darling old pet! I'll be grateful till I die," she said, thrusting the pen into Berel's hand.

With tragic acceptance of his weakness, Berel scrawled his well-known signature on one sheet after another. With a beaten look of hatred he handed them to Shapiro, now pacified and smiling.

Long after they had gone, Berel still sat in the same chair. He made no move. He uttered no sound. With doubled fists thrust between his knees, he sat there, his head sunk on his breast.

In the depths of his anguish a sudden light flashed. He picked up the rejected songs and read them with regained understanding. All the cheap triteness, the jazz vulgarity of the lines leaped at him and hit him in the face.

"Pfui!" he laughed with bitter loathing, as he flung the tawdry verses from him.

Like a prisoner unbound, he sprang to his feet. He would shake himself free from the shackles of his riches! All this clutter of things about him—this huge, stuffy house with its useless rooms—the servants—his limousine—each added luxury was only another bar shutting him out from the light.

For an instant he pondered how to get rid of his stifling wealth. Should he leave it to Moisheh or Hanneh Breineh? No—they should not be choked under this mantle of treasure that had nearly choked the life in him.

A flash of inspiration—Maizie! God help her, poor life-loving Maizie! He would give it to her outright—everything, down to the last kitchen pot—only to be a free man again!

As quick as thought Berel scribbled a note to his lawyer, directing him to carry out this reckless whim. Then he went to the closet where, out of some strange, whimsical sentiment, he still kept his shabby old coat and hat. In a moment he was the old Berel again. Still in his frenzy, he strode toward the door.

"Back—back to Hanneh Breineh—to Moisheh—back to my own people! Free—free!"

He waved his hands exultantly. The walls resounded with his triumphant laughter. Grasping his shabby old cap in his hand, he raised it high over his head and

slammed the gold-paneled door behind him with a thundering crash.

V

"LAST lot cheap! Apples sweet like honey!"

"Fish, live, fresh fish!"

"Shoe laces, matches, pins!"

The raucous orchestra of voices rose and fell in whining, blatant discord. Into the myriad sounds the rumbling Elevated bored its roaring thunder. Dirty, multicolored rags—the pinions of poverty—fluttered from the crowded windows. Streams of human atoms surged up and down the sidewalk littered with filth. Horses and humans pounded and scuttled through the middle of the street.

Berel's face shone exultant out of the crowd. In the quickening warmth of this old, familiar poverty his being expanded and breathed in huge drafts of air. The jostling mass of humanity that pressed about him was like the close embrace of countless friends.

Ach, here in this elemental struggle for existence was the reality he was seeking. It cried to him out of the dirty, driven faces. Here was the life that has never yet been fully lived. Here were the songs that have not yet been adequately sung.

"A black year on you, robber, swindler! If I go to buy rotten apples, should you charge me for fruit from heaven?"

The familiar voice shot like a bolt to his awakening heart. He looked up to see Hanneh Breineh's ragged figure wedged in between two pushcarts, her face ecstatic with the zest of bargaining.

"Hanneh Breineh!" he cried, seizing her market basket, and almost throwing himself on her neck in a rush of exuberant affection. "I've come back to you and Moisheh!"

"God from the world! What's this—you in rags?" A quick look of suspicion crept into her face. "Did you lose your money? Did you maybe play cards?"

"I left it all to her—you know—every cent of the ill-gotten money."

"Left your money to that doll's face?"

Hanneh clutched her head and peered at him out of her red-lidded eyes.

"Where's Moisheh?" Berel asked.

He came closer to her, his whole face expressing the most childlike faith in her acceptance of his helplessness, in the assurance of her welcome.

"Don't you yet know the pants pressers was on a strike, and he owed me the rent for so long he went away from shame?"

"But where is he—my brother?" cried Berel, in despair.

"The devil knows, not me. I only know he owes me the rent!"

"Moisheh gone?" He felt the earth slipping from under him. He seized Hanneh Breineh's hand imploringly. "You can squeeze me in with the other boarders—put me up on chairs—over the washtub—anywhere. I got no one but you!"

"No one but me?" Thrusting him down to his knees, she towered above him like some serpent-headed fury. "What did you ever done for me when you had it good, that I should take pity on you now? Why was you such a stingy to me when you were rolling yourself in riches?"

Her voice came in thick gusts of passion, as the smoldering feeling of past neglect burst from her in volcanic wrath. "You black-hearted *schmorrer*, you!"

A crowd of neighbors and passers-by, who had gathered at her first cursing screams, now surged closer. With her passion for harangue, she was lifted to sublime heights of vituperative eloquence by her sensation-hungry audience.

"People! Give a look only! This dirty bum throws away all his money on a doll's face, and then wants me to take the bread from the mouths of my own children to feed him!" She shook her fist in Berel's face. "Loafer—liar! I was always telling you your bad end!"

A hoarse voice rose from the crowd.

"Pfui, the rotten rich one!"

"He used to blow from himself like a Vanderbilt!"

"Came riding around in automobiles!"

All the pent-up envy that they never dared express while he was in power suddenly found voice.

"He's crazy—*meshugeh*!"

The mob took up the abuse and began to press closer. A thick piece of mud from an unknown hand flattened itself on the ashen cheek of the shaken poet. Instantly the lust for persecution swept the crowd. Mud rained on the crouching figure in their midst. Hoarse invectives, shrieks, infamous laughter rose from the mob, now losing all control.

With the look of a hunted beast, Berel drove his way through the merciless crowd. His clothing swirled in streaming rags be-

hind him as he fled on, driven by the one instinct to escape alive.

When he had outdistanced those who pursued, he dropped in a dark hallway of an alley. Utter exhaustion drained him of all thought, all feeling.

Dawn came. Still Berel slept. From the near-by street the clattering of a morning milk wagon roused him slightly. He stirred painfully, then sank back into a dream which grew as vivid as life.

He saw himself a tiny, black ant in an ant hill. While plodding toilsomely with the teeming hive, he suddenly ventured on a path of his own. Then a huge, destroying force overwhelmed and crushed him, to the applause of the other ants, slaves of their traditional routine.

The pounding of a hammer rang above his head. He opened his eyes. A man was nailing a sign to the doorway into which he had sunk the night before. Berel rubbed his heavy-lidded eyes, and, blinking, read the words:

MACHINE HANDS WANTED

"Food! *Oi weh*, a bite to eat! A job should I take?"

The disjointed thoughts of his tired brain urged him to move. He tried to rise, but he ached in every limb. The pain in his stiff body brought back to him the terror through which he had lived the day before. More than starvation, he feared the abyss of madness that yawned before him.

"Machine hand—anything," he told himself. "Only to be sane—only to be like the rest—only to have peace!"

This new humility gave him strength. He mounted the stairs of the factory and took his place in the waiting line of applicants for work.

VI

For weeks Berel Pinsky worked, dull and inanimate as the machines he had learned to drive. Work, eat, sleep—eat, sleep, work. Day after day he went to and from his hall bedroom, day after day to and from the shop.

He had ceased to struggle. He had ceased to be an individual, a soul apart. He was a piece of a mass, a cog of a machine, an ant of an ant hill. Individually he was nothing—they were nothing. Together, they made up the shop.

So he went on. Inert, dumb as a beast in a yoke, he brushed against his neighbors.

He never talked. As if in a dream, he heard the shrill babble of the other shop hands rise above the roaring noises of the machines.

One day, while eating his scanty lunch, lost in a dull, wandering daydream, he felt a movement at his elbow. Looking up, he saw Sosheh, the finisher, furtively reaching for a crust that had dropped from his thick slice of bread.

"You don't want it yet?" she questioned, her face coloring with confusion.

"No," he answered, surprised out of his silence. "But didn't you have any lunch?"

"I'm saving myself from my lunches to buy me a red feather on my new spring hat."

He looked at Sosheh curiously, and noticed for the first time the pinched look of the pale young face.

"Red over that olive paleness!" he mused. "How bright and singing that color would be!"

Moved by an impulse of friendliness, he pushed an apple toward her.

"Take it," he said. "I had one for my lunch already."

He watched her with smiling interest as she bit hungrily into the juicy fruit.

"Will your feather be as red as this apple?" he asked.

"Ach!" she said, with her mouth full.

"If you could only give a look how that feather is to me becoming! The redness waves over my black hair like waves from red wine!"

"Why, that girl is a poet!" he thought, thrilled by the way her mind leaped in her dumb yearning for beauty.

The next noon she appeared with a paper bag in her hand. Reverently she drew forth a bright red cock's feather.

"Nu, ain't it grand? For two weeks my lunch money it is."

"How they want to shine, the driven things, even in the shop!" he mused. "Starving for a bit of bright color—denying themselves food for the shimmering touch of a little beauty!"

One morning, when he had risen to go to work in the gray dawn, he found his landlady bending over an ironing board in the dim gaslight, pressing a child's white dress. She put down the iron to give Berel his breakfast.

"My little Gittel is going to speak a piece to-day." Her face glowed as she

showed him the frock. "Give a look only on those flowers I stitched out myself on the sash. Don't they smell almost the fields to you?"

He gazed in wonder at the mother's face beaming down at him. How could Tzipch Yenteh still sense the perfume of the fields in this dead grind of work? How could his care-crushed landlady, with seven hungry mouths to feed—how could she still reach out for the beautiful? His path to work was lit up by Tzipch Yenteh's face as she showed him her Gittel's dress in all its freshness.

Little by little he found himself becoming interested in the people about him. Each had his own hidden craving. Each one longed for something beautiful that was his and no one else's.

Beauty—beauty! *Ach*, the lure of it, the tender hope of it! How it filled every heart with its quickening breath! It made no difference what form it took—whether it was the craving for a bright feather, a passion for an ideal, or the love of man for woman. Behind it all was the same flaming hope, the same deathless upreaching for the higher life!

God, what a song to sing! The unperishable glamour of beauty, painting the darkest sweatshop in rainbow colors of heaven, splashing the gloom of the human ant hill with the golden pigments of sunrise and sunset!

Lifted to winged heights by the onrush of this new vision, Berel swept home with the other toilers pouring from shops and factories.

How thankful he was for the joy of his bleak little room! He shut the door, secure in his solitude. Voices began to speak to him. Faces began to shine for him—the dumb, the oppressed, the toil-driven multitudes who lived and breathed unconscious of the cryings-out in them. All the thwarted longings of their lives, all the baffled feelings of their hearts, all the aching dumbness of their lips, rose to his sympathetic lips, singing the song of the imperishable soul in them.

Berel thought how Beethoven lay prone on the ground, his deaf ears hearing the beat of insects' wings, the rustle of grass, the bloom of buds, all the myriad voices of the pregnant earth. For the first time since the loss of his gift in the jazz pit of Tin Pan Alley, the young poet heard the rhythm of divine creation.

He drew a sheet of white paper before his eyes. From his trembling fingers flowed a poem that wrote its own music—every line a song—the whole a symphony of his regeneration.

"To think that I once despised them—my own people!" he mused. "*Ach*, I was too dense with young pride to see them then!"

His thoughts digging down into the soil of his awakened spirit, he cried aloud:

"Beauty is everywhere, but I can sing it only of my own people. Some one will find it even in Tin Pan Alley—among Maizie's life-loving crowd; but I, in this life, must be the poet of the factories—of my own East Side!"

VII

"It's me—Hanneh Breineh!"

A loud thumping at the door and a shrill chatter of voices broke in upon Berel's meditations.

"Me—Moisheh!"

"Come in!" he cried, welcoming this human inbreak after his long vigil.

"Here we got him!" Berel was smothered in Hanneh Breineh's gushing embrace. "Where did you run away that time, you crazy? Don't you yet know my bitter heart? I never mean nothing when I curse."

"For months it dried out our eyes from our heads looking for you," gulped Moisheh, tearing him from Hanneh's greedy arms.

Berel fell on his brother's neck, weeping out the whole rush and tide of his newborn humility.

"Mine own brother, with the old shine from his eyes!"

Moisheh held Berel off, then crushed him in another long hug. Hanneh Breineh, with ostentatious importance, held up her capacious market basket and drew forth a greasy bundle.

"Let's make from it a holiday, for good luck. It's only a bargain, this apple strudel," she said apologetically, breaking it in pieces and giving one to each.

Berel's tears rang out in laughter.

"My own hearts—my own people!"

"*Mazeltuf!* Good luck!" chanted Hanneh Breineh, sipping hungrily the last drops of luscious juice that oozed from the apple strudel.

Raising his piece on high, Moisheh chimed in:

"Good luck and the new life!"

Mr. Tilly's Séance

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE REMARKABLE SPIRITUALISTIC MANIFESTATIONS AT THE HOUSE OF MRS. CUMBERBATCH

By E. F. Benson

MR. TILLY had only the briefest moment for reflection when, as he slipped and fell on the greasy wood pavement at Hyde Park Corner, which he was crossing at a smart trot, he saw the huge traction engine, with its grooved, ponderous wheels, towering high above him.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" he said petulantly. "It will certainly crush me quite flat, and I shan't be able to be at Mrs. Cumberbatch's séance! Most provoking! A-ow!"

The words were hardly out of his mouth when the first half of his horrid anticipations was thoroughly fulfilled. A heavy wheel passed over him from head to foot, and flattened him out completely. Then the driver—too late—reversed his engine and passed over Mr. Tilly again. Finally he lost his head, whistled loudly, and stopped.

The policeman on duty at the corner turned faint at the sight of the catastrophe, but presently recovered sufficiently to hold up the traffic and run to see what could be done. It was all so much up with Mr. Tilly that the only thing possible was to get the hysterical driver to move clear. Then the ambulance from the hospital was sent for, and Mr. Tilly's remains—detached with great difficulty from the road, so firmly had they been pressed into it—were reverently carried away into the mortuary.

Meanwhile Mr. Tilly had experienced one moment's excruciating pain, resembling the severest neuralgia, as his head was ground beneath the wheel; but almost before he realized it the pain was past, and he found himself, still rather dazed, floating or standing—he did not know which—in the middle of the road.

There had been no break in his consciousness. He perfectly recollected slip-

ping, and wondered how he had managed to save himself. He saw the arrested traffic and the policeman with white, wan face making suggestions to the gibbering driver. He received the very puzzling impression that the traction engine was all mixed up with him. He had a sensation of red-hot coals and boiling water and rivets all around him, but yet no feeling of scalding or burning or compression. He was, on the contrary, extremely comfortable, and had the most pleasant consciousness of buoyancy and freedom.

Then the engine puffed, the wheels went round, and immediately, to his immense surprise, he perceived his own crushed remains, flat as a biscuit, lying on the roadway. He identified them for certain by his new suit of clothes, which he had put on for the first time that morning, and by one patent leather boot, which had escaped demolition.

"But what on earth has happened?" he said. "Here am I, and yet that poor pressed flower of arms and legs is me—or rather I—also. And how terribly upset the driver looks! Why, I do believe that I've been run over! It did hurt for a moment, now I come to think of it. My good man, where are you shoving to? Don't you see me?"

He addressed these two questions to the policeman, who appeared to walk right through him; but the man took no notice, and calmly came out on the other side. It was quite evident that he did not see Mr. Tilly, or apprehend him in any way.

Mr. Tilly was still feeling rather at sea amid these unusual occurrences. There began to steal into his mind a glimpse of the fact that was so obvious to the crowd which formed an interested but respectful ring round his body. Men stood with bared

heads. Women screamed, and looked away, and looked back again.

"I really believe I'm dead," said he. "That's the only hypothesis which will cover the facts; but I must feel more certain of it before I do anything. Ah, here they come with the ambulance! To look at me, I must be terribly hurt, and yet I don't feel hurt. I should feel hurt, surely, if I was hurt. I must be dead!"

II

THIS seemed to be the only possible conclusion, but Mr. Tilly was far from realizing it yet. A lane had been made through the crowd for the stretcher bearers, and he found himself wincing when they began to detach him from the road.

"Oh, do take care!" he said. "That's the sciatic nerve protruding there, isn't it? A-ow! No, it didn't hurt, after all. My new clothes, too—I put them on to-day for the first time. What bad luck! Now you're holding my leg upside down. Of course all my money is coming out of my trousers pocket! And there's my ticket for the séance—I must have that. I may use it, after all."

He tweaked it out of the fingers of a bystander who had picked it up, and laughed to see the expression of amazement on the man's face as the card suddenly vanished. That gave him something fresh to think about, and he pondered for a moment over some touch of association set up by it.

"I have it!" he thought. "It is clear that the moment I came into connection with that card, it became invisible. I'm invisible myself—to the grosser sense, of course—and everything I hold becomes invisible. Most interesting! That accounts for the sudden appearance of small objects at a séance. The spirit has been holding them, and as long as he holds them they are invisible. Then he lets go, and there's the flower, or the spirit photograph, on the table. It accounts, too, for the sudden disappearances of such objects. The spirit has taken them, though the scoffers say that the medium has secreted them about his person. It is true that, when searched, he sometimes appears to have done so; but that may be a joke on the part of the spirit. Now what am I to do with myself? Let me see—there's the clock. It's just half past ten. All this has happened in a few minutes, for it was a quarter past when I left my house. Half past ten—what does

that mean exactly? I used to know what it meant, but now it seems nonsense. Ten what? Hours, is it? What's an hour?"

This was very puzzling. Mr. Tilly felt that he used to know what an hour and a minute meant, but the perception of that, naturally enough, had ceased with his emergence from time and space into eternity. The conception of time was like some memory which, refusing to record itself on the consciousness, lies hidden in some dark corner of the brain, laughing at the owner's efforts to ferret it out.

While he still interrogated his mind over this lapsed perception, he found that space, as well as time, had similarly grown obsolete for him. He had caught sight of his friend Miss Ida Soulsby, who he knew was to be present at Mrs. Cumberbatch's séance, hurrying with birdlike steps down the pavement opposite. Forgetting for the moment that he was a disembodied spirit, he made the effort of will which in his past human existence would have set his legs in pursuit of her, and found that the effort of will alone was enough to place him at her side.

"My dear Miss Soulsby," he said, "I was on my way to Mrs. Cumberbatch's house when I was knocked down and killed. It was far from unpleasant—a moment's headache—"

So far his natural volubility had carried him before he recollected that he was neither audible nor visible to those still closed in by the muddy vesture of decay, and stopped short.

Though it was clear that what he said was inaudible to Miss Soulsby's rather large, intelligent-looking ears, it seemed that some consciousness of his presence was conveyed to her finer sense. She looked suddenly startled, a flush rose to her face, and he heard her murmur:

"Very odd! I wonder why I received so vivid an impression of dear Teddy!"

That gave Mr. Tilly a pleasant shock. He had long admired the lady, and here she was alluding to him as "dear Teddy."

This feeling was followed by a momentary regret that he had been killed. He would have liked to be possessed of this information before, and to pursue the primrose path of dalliance down which it seemed to lead. His intentions, of course, would have been strictly honorable, as always. The path of dalliance would have conducted them both, if she consented, to the altar,

where the primroses would have been exchanged for orange blossoms.

But Mr. Tilly's regret was quite short-lived. Though the altar seemed inaccessible, the primrose path might still be open, for many members of the spiritualistic circle in which he lived were on most affectionate relations with their spiritual guide and with friends who, like himself, had passed over. From a human point of view, these innocent and even elevating flirtations had always seemed to him rather bloodless; but now, looking on them from the far side, he saw how charming they were, for they gave him the sense of still having a place and an identity in the world he had just quitted.

He pressed Miss Ida's hand—or rather put himself into the spiritual condition of so doing—and could vaguely feel that it had some hint of warmth and solidity about it. This was gratifying, for it showed that though he had passed out of the material plane, he could still be in touch with it.

Still more gratifying was it to observe that a pleased and secret smile overspread Miss Ida's fine features as he gave this token of his presence. Perhaps she only smiled at her own thoughts, but in any case it was he who had inspired them. Encouraged by this, he indulged in a more intimate token of affection, and permitted himself a respectful salute; but he saw that he had gone too far, for she said to herself "Hush, hush!" and quickened her pace, as if to leave these amorous thoughts behind.

He felt that he was beginning to adjust himself to the new conditions in which he would now live, or, at any rate, that he was getting some sort of inkling as to what they were. Time existed no more for him, nor yet did space, since the wish to be at Miss Ida's side had instantly transported him there.

With a view to testing this further, he wished himself back in his flat. As swiftly as the change of scene in a cinematograph show he found himself there. He perceived that the news of his death must have reached his servants, for the cook and the parlor maid, with excited faces, were talking over the event.

"Poor little gentleman!" said the cook. "It seems a shame, it does. He never hurt a fly, and to think of one of those great engines laying him out flat! I hope they'll take him to the cemetery from the hospital. I never could bear a corpse in the house."

The great strapping parlor maid tossed her head.

"Well, I'm not sure that it doesn't serve him right," she observed. "Always messing about with spirits, he was. The knockings and the concertinas was awful sometimes, when I've been laying out supper in the dining room. Now perhaps he'll come himself and visit the rest of the loonies! I'm sorry, all the same. A less troublesome little gentleman never stepped. Always pleasant, too, and wages paid to the day."

These regretful comments and encomiums were something of a shock to Mr. Tilly. He had imagined that his excellent servants regarded him with a respectful affection, as befitted some sort of demigod, and the rôle of the "poor little gentleman" was not at all to his mind. Although what they thought of him could no longer have the smallest significance, this revelation of their real estimate irritated him profoundly.

"I never heard such impertinence!" he said—so he thought—quite out loud.

Still intensely earth-bound, he was astonished to see that they had no perception of his presence. He raised his voice, replete with extreme irony, and addressed his cook.

"You may reserve your criticisms on my character for your saucepans," he said. "They will no doubt appreciate them. As regards the arrangements for my funeral, I have already provided for them in my will, and do not propose to consult your convenience. At present—"

"Lor'!" said Mrs. Inglis. "I declare I can almost hear his voice, poor little fellow! Husky it was, as if he would do better by clearing his throat. I suppose I'd best be making a black bow to my cap. His lawyers and what not will be coming here presently."

Mr. Tilly had no sympathy with this suggestion. He was immensely conscious of being quite alive, and the idea of his servants behaving as if he was dead, especially after the way in which they had spoken about him, was extremely vexing.

Wishing to give them some striking evidence of his presence and his activity, he banged his hand angrily on the dining room table, from which the breakfast equipage had not yet been cleared. Three tremendous blows he gave it, and was rejoiced to see that the parlor maid looked startled. Mrs. Inglis's face remained perfectly placid.

"Why, if I didn't hear a sort of rapping sound!" said Talton, the parlor maid. "Where did it come from?"

"Nonsense! You've got the jumps, dear," said Mrs. Inglis, picking up a remaining rasher of bacon on a fork, and putting it into her capacious mouth.

Mr. Tilly was delighted at making any impression at all on either of these impercipient females.

"Talton!" he called at the top of his voice.

"Why, what's that?" said Talton. "Almost hear his voice, do you say, Mrs. Inglis? I declare I did hear his voice then!"

"A pack o' nonsense, dear," replied Mrs. Inglis placidly. "That's a prime bit of bacon, and there's a good cut of it left. Why, you're all of a tremble! It's your imagination."

Suddenly it struck Mr. Tilly that he might be employing himself much better than in making such extreme exertions to convey so slight a hint of his presence to his parlor maid, and that the séance at the house of Mrs. Cumberbatch, the medium, would afford him much easier opportunities of getting through to the earth plane again. He gave the table a couple of additional thumps, and wished himself at Mrs. Cumberbatch's, nearly a mile away.

He scarcely heard Talton's faint scream at the sound of his blows before he found himself in West Norfolk Street.

III

MR. TILLY knew the house well, and went straight to the drawing-room, which was the scene of the séances he had so often and so eagerly attended.

Mrs. Cumberbatch, who had a long, spoon-shaped face, had already pulled down the blinds, leaving the room in total darkness except for the feeble glimmer of a night light, which, under a shade of ruby glass, stood on the mantelpiece in front of a colored photograph of Cardinal Newman. Miss Ida Soulsby was seated at the table. So were Mr. and Mrs. Meriott, who paid their guineas at least twice a week in order to consult their spiritual guide, Abibel, and who received mysterious advice about their indigestion and their investments. Sir John Plaipe, who was much interested in the details of his previous incarnation as a Chaldean priest, completed the circle. His guide, who revealed to Sir John his sacerdotal career, was playfully called Mespot.

Naturally many other spirits visited them, for Miss Soulsby had no less than three guides in her spiritual household—Sapphire, Semiramis, and Sweet William—while Napoleon and Plato were not infrequent guests. Cardinal Newman, too, was a great favorite, and they encouraged his presence by the singing in unison of "Lead, Kindly Light." He could hardly ever resist that.

Mr. Tilly observed with pleasure that there was a vacant seat by the table—placed there for him, no doubt. As he entered, Mrs. Cumberbatch peered at her watch.

"Eleven o'clock already," she said, "and Mr. Tilly is not here yet. I wonder what can have kept him! What shall we do, dear friends? Abibel sometimes gets very impatient if we keep him waiting."

Mr. and Mrs. Meriott were getting impatient, too, for he terribly wanted to ask about Mexican oils, and she had a very vexatious heartburn.

"And Mespot doesn't like waiting, either," said Sir John, jealous for the prestige of his protector. "Not to mention Sweet William," he added.

Miss Soulsby gave a little silvery laugh.

"Oh, but my Sweet William's so good and kind!" she said. "Besides, I have a feeling, quite a psychic feeling, Mrs. Cumberbatch, that Mr. Tilly is very close."

"So I am," said Mr. Tilly.

"Indeed, as I walked here," continued Miss Soulsby, "I felt that Mr. Tilly was quite close to me. Dear me, what's that?"

Mr. Tilly was so delighted at being sensed that he could not resist giving a tremendous rap on the table, in a sort of pleased applause. Mrs. Cumberbatch heard it, too.

"I'm sure that's Abibel come to tell us that he is ready," she said. "I know Abibel's knock. A little patience, Abibel! Let's give Mr. Tilly three minutes more, and then begin. Perhaps, if we pull up the blinds, Abibel will understand we haven't begun."

This was done, and Miss Soulsby glided to the window, in order to make known Mr. Tilly's approach, for he always came along the opposite sidewalk, and crossed over by the little island in the river of traffic. There was evidently some lately published news, for the readers of early editions were busy, and she caught sight of one of the advertisement boards bearing in large letters the

announcement of a fatal accident at Hyde Park Corner.

Miss Soulsby drew in her breath with a hissing sound and turned away, unwilling to have her psychic tranquillity upset by the intrusion of painful mundane incidents; but Mr. Tilly, who had followed her to the window, and had seen what she had seen, could hardly restrain a spiritual whoop of exultation.

"Why, it's all about me!" he said. "Such large letters, too—very gratifying! Subsequent editions will no doubt contain my name."

He gave another loud rap to call attention to himself. Mrs. Cumberbatch, sitting down in her antique chair, which had once belonged to Mme. Blavatsky, again heard.

"Well, if that isn't Abibel again!" she said. "Be quiet, naughty! Perhaps we had better begin."

IV

MRS. CUMBERBATCH recited the usual invocation to guides and angels, and leaned back in her chair. Presently she began to twitch and mutter, and shortly afterward, with several loud snorts, she relapsed into cataleptic immobility. There she lay, stiff as a poker—a port of call, so to speak, for any voyaging intelligences.

With pleased anticipation Mr. Tilly awaited their coming. How gratifying if Napoleon, with whom he had so often talked, should recognize him and say:

"Pleased to see you, Mr. Tilly. I perceive you have joined us."

The room was dark except for the little ruby-shaded candle, in front of Cardinal Newman; but to Mr. Tilly's emancipated perceptions the withdrawal of mere material light made no difference. He idly wondered why it was generally supposed that disembodied spirits like himself produce their most powerful efforts in the dark. He could not imagine the reason for that.

What puzzled him still more, there was not to his spiritual perception any sign of those colleagues of his—for so he might now call them—who usually attended Mrs. Cumberbatch's seances in such gratifying numbers. Though she had been moaning and muttering for a long time now, Mr. Tilly was in no way conscious of the presence of Abibel or Sweet William or Sapphire or Napoleon.

"They ought to be here by now," he said to himself.

While he still wondered at their absence, he saw, to his amazed disgust, that the medium's hand—now covered with a black glove, and thus invisible to ordinary human vision in the darkness—was groping about the table, evidently searching for the megaphone trumpet which lay there. He found that he could read her mind as easily as he had read Miss Ida's half an hour ago, though with far less satisfaction. He knew that though Mrs. Cumberbatch affirmed that she never touched the trumpet, she was now intending to apply it to her own mouth, and to pretend to be Abibel or Semiramis or somebody. Much shocked at this, he snatched up the instrument himself.

He immediately discovered that the lady was not in trance at all, for she opened her sharp black eyes—which had always reminded him of buttons covered with American cloth—and gave a great gasp.

"Why, Mr. Tilly!" she said. "On the spiritual plane, too!"

The rest of the circle was now singing "Lead, Kindly Light," in order to encourage Cardinal Newman, and this conversation was conducted under cover of the hoarse, crooning voices. Mr. Tilly had the feeling that though Mrs. Cumberbatch saw and heard him as clearly as he saw her, he was quite imperceptible to the others.

"Yes, I've been killed," he said. "I want to get into touch with the material world. That's why I came here; but I want to get into touch with other spirits, too. Surely Abibel or Mespot ought to be here by this time!"

He received no answer, and her eyes fell before his like those of a detected charlatan. A terrible suspicion invaded his mind.

"What? Are you a fraud, Mrs. Cumberbatch?" he asked. "Oh, for shame! Think of all the guineas I have paid you!"

"You shall have them all back," said Mrs. Cumberbatch; "but don't tell on me!"

She began to whimper. He remembered that she often made that sort of sniffing noise when Abibel was supposed to be taking possession of her.

"That usually means that Abibel is coming," he said with withering sarcasm. "Come along, Abibel—we're waiting!"

"Give me the trumpet," whispered the miserable medium. "Oh, please give me the trumpet!"

"I shall do nothing of the kind," said Mr. Tilly indignantly. "I would sooner use it myself."

She gave a sob of relief.

"Oh, do, Mr. Tilly," she said. "What a wonderful idea! It will be most interesting to everybody to hear you talk just after you've been killed, and before they know. It would be the making of me! And I'm not a fraud—at least, not altogether. I do have spiritual perceptions sometimes; spirits do communicate through me. When they won't come through, it's a dreadful temptation to a poor woman—to supplement them by human agency. How could I be seeing and hearing you now, and be able to talk to you—so pleasantly, I'm sure—if I hadn't supernormal powers? You've been killed, so you assure me, and yet I can see and hear you quite plainly. Where did it happen, may I ask, if it's not a painful subject?"

"Hyde Park Corner, half an hour ago," said Mr. Tilly. "No, it hurt only for a moment, thanks. About your other suggestion, why—"

While the third verse of "Lead, Kindly Light," was going on, Mr. Tilly applied his mind to this difficult situation. It was quite true that if Mrs. Cumberbatch had no power of communication with the unseen, she could not possibly have seen him; but she evidently had done so, and had heard him, too, for their conversation had been conducted on the spirit plane with perfect lucidity. Naturally, now that he was a genuine spirit, he did not want to be mixed up in fraudulent mediumship. He felt that such a thing would seriously compromise him on the other side, where, probably, it was widely known that Mrs. Cumberbatch was a person to be avoided. On the other hand, having so soon found a medium through whom he could communicate with his friends, it was hard to take the high moral view of the matter and say that he would have nothing whatever to do with her.

"I don't know if I trust you," he said. "I shouldn't have a moment's peace if I thought that you would be giving out all sorts of bogus messages from me, for which I wasn't responsible at all. You've done it with Abibel and Mespot. How can I know that when I don't choose to communicate through you, you won't make up all sorts of piffle on your own account?"

She positively writhed in her chair.

"Oh, I'll turn over a new leaf," she said. "I will leave all that sort of thing behind me. I am a medium. Look at me! Don't

I seem more real to you than any of the others? Don't I belong to your plane in a way that none of the others do? I may be occasionally fraudulent, and I can no more get Napoleon here than I can fly, but I'm genuine, too. Oh, Mr. Tilly, be indulgent to us poor human creatures! It isn't so long, you know, since you were one of us yourself."

The mention of Napoleon, with the information that Mrs. Cumberbatch had never been controlled by that famous man, wounded Mr. Tilly again. Often in this darkened room he had held long colloquies with the great soldier, and Napoleon had given him most interesting details of his life on St. Helena—which, Mr. Tilly had found, were often borne out by Lord Rosebery's pleasant volume, "The Last Phase." Now the whole thing wore a more sinister aspect, and suspicion as solid as certainty bumped against his mind.

"Confess!" he said. "Where did you get all that Napoleon talk from? You told us you had never read Lord Rosebery's book, and allowed us to look through your library, to see that it wasn't there. Be honest for once, Mrs. Cumberbatch!"

She suppressed a sob.

"I will," she said. "The book was there all the time. I put it into an old cover marked 'Elegant Extracts.' But I'm not wholly a fraud. We're talking together—you, a spirit, and I, a mortal female. These people can't hear us talk; but only look at me, and you'll see. You can talk to them through me, if you'll only be so kind. I don't often get in touch with a genuine spirit like yourself."

Mr. Tilly glanced at the other sitters and then back to the medium, who, to keep the others interested, was making weird gurgling noises, like an undervitalized siphon. Certainly she was far clearer to him than were the others, and her argument that she was able to see and hear him had great weight.

Then a new and curious perception came to him. Her mind seemed spread out before him like a pool of slightly muddy water, and he figured himself as standing on a header board above it, perfectly able, if he chose, to immerse himself in it. The objection to so doing was its muddiness, its materiality. The reason for so doing was that he felt that then he would be able to be heard by the others, possibly to be seen by them, certainly to come into touch

with them. As it was, the loudest bangs on the table were only faintly perceptible.

"I think I'm beginning to understand," he said.

"Oh, Mr. Tilly, jump in like a kind, good spirit!" she said. "Make your own test condition. Put your hand over my mouth, to make sure that I'm not speaking, and keep hold of the trumpet."

"And you'll promise not to cheat any more?" he asked.

"Never!"

He made up his mind.

"All right, then," he said, and, so to speak, dived into her mind.

V

HE experienced the oddest sensation. It was like passing out of some fine, sunny air into the stuffiest of unventilated rooms. Space and time closed over him again. His head swam, his eyes were heavy.

Then, with the trumpet in one hand, he laid the other firmly over Mrs. Cumberbatch's mouth. Looking around, he saw that the room seemed almost completely dark, but that the outline of the figures sitting round the table had vastly gained in solidity.

"Here I am!" he said briskly.

Miss Soulsby gave a startled exclamation.

"Why, that's Mr. Tilly's voice!" she whispered.

"Why, of course it is," said Mr. Tilly. "I've just passed over at Hyde Park Corner, under a traction engine."

He felt the dead weight of the medium's mind, of her conventional conceptions, of her mild, unreal piety, pressing in on him from all sides, stifling and confusing him. Whatever he said had to pass through muddy water.

"There's a wonderful feeling of joy and lightness," he said. "I can't tell you of the sunshine and happiness. We're all very busy and active, helping others. It's such a pleasure, dear friends, to be able to get into touch with you all again. Death is not death. It is the gate of life, and—"

He broke off suddenly.

"Oh, I can't stand this!" he said to the medium. "You make me talk such twaddle. Do get your stupid mind out of the way! Can't we do anything in which you won't interfere with me so much?"

"Can you give us some spirit lights in the room?" suggested Mrs. Cumberbatch in a sleepy voice. "You have come

through beautifully, Mr. Tilly. It's too dear of you!"

"You're sure you haven't arranged some phosphorescent patches already?" asked Mr. Tilly suspiciously.

"Yes, there are one or two near the mantelpiece, but none anywhere else," said Mrs. Cumberbatch. "Dear Mr. Tilly, I swear there are not. Just give us a nice star with long rays on the ceiling!"

Mr. Tilly was the most good-natured of men, always willing to help an unattractive female in distress.

"I shall require the phosphorescent patches to be given into my hands after the seance," he whispered.

Then, by the mere effort of his imagination, he proceeded to light a beautiful big star, with red and violet rays, on the ceiling. Of course it was not nearly as brilliant as his own conception of it, for its light had to pass through the opacity of the medium's mind, but it was still a most striking object, and it elicited gasps of applause from the company. To enhance the effect of the star, he intoned a few very pretty lines by Adelaide Anne Procter, whose poems had always seemed to Mr. Tilly to emanate from the topmost peak of Parnassus.

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Tilly!" whispered the medium. "It was lovely! Would a photograph of it be permitted on some future occasion, if you would be so kind as to reproduce it again?"

"Oh, I don't know," replied Mr. Tilly irritably. "I want to get out. I'm very hot and uncomfortable, and it's all so cheap."

"Cheap?" ejaculated Mrs. Cumberbatch. "Why, there's not a medium in London whose future wouldn't be made by a real genuine star like that—say twice a week!"

"But I wasn't run over in order that I might make the fortune of mediums," observed Mr. Tilly. "I want to go. It's all rather degrading. I want to see something of my new world. I don't know what it's like yet."

"Oh, but, Mr. Tilly!" said she. "You told us lovely things about it—how busy and happy you were."

"No, I didn't. It was you who said that—at least, it was you who put it into my head."

Even as he wished, he found himself emerging from the dull waters of Mrs. Cumberbatch's mind.

"There's the whole new world waiting for me," he said. "I must go and see it. I'll come back and tell you, for it must be full of marvelous revelations."

Suddenly he felt the uselessness of such a promise. There was that thick fluid of materiality to pierce. As it dripped off him again, he began to see that nothing of the fine, rare quality of life which he just began to experience could penetrate these opacities. That was why, perhaps, all that thus came across from the spirit world was so stupid, so banal. Those of whom he now was one could tap on furniture, could light stars, could abound with commonplace platitudes, could read as in a book the mind of medium or sitters, but nothing more. They had to pass into the region of gross perceptions, to be seen of blind eyes and be heard of deaf ears.

Mrs. Cumberbatch stirred.

"The power is failing," she said in a deep voice, which Mr. Tilly felt was meant to imitate his own. "I must leave you now, dear friends!"

He felt much exasperated.

"The power isn't failing!" he shouted. "It wasn't I who said that!"

He had emerged too far. He perceived that nobody except the medium heard him.

"Oh, don't be vexed, Mr. Tilly," she said. "That's only a formula; but you're leaving us very soon. Not time for just one materialization? They are more convincing than anything, to most inquirers."

"Not one," said he. "You don't understand how stifling it is even to speak through you and make stars; but I'll come back as soon as I find there's anything new that I can get through to you. What's the use of my repeating all that stale stuff about being busy and happy? They've been told that often enough already. Besides, I have got to see if it's true. Good-by—don't cheat any more!"

He dropped his card of admittance to the séance on the table, and heard murmurs of excitement as he floated off.

VI

THE news of the wonderful star, and of the presence of Mr. Tilly at the séance within half an hour of his death, which at the time was unknown to any of the sitters, spread swiftly through spiritualistic circles.

The Psychical Research Society sent a committee to take independent evidence from all those present, but the investigators were inclined to attribute the occurrence to a subtle mixture of thought transference and unconscious visual impression when they heard that Miss Soulsby had, a few minutes previously, seen a news board in the street outside, announcing the accident at Hyde Park Corner. This explanation was rather elaborate, for it postulated that Miss Soulsby, thinking of Mr. Tilly's non-arrival, had combined that with the accident, and had probably—though perhaps unconsciously—seen the name of the victim on another news board, and had transferred the whole by telepathy to the mind of the medium.

As for the star on the ceiling, though they could not account for it, the inquirers found remains of phosphorescent paint on the panels of the wall above the mantelpiece, and came to the conclusion that the star had been produced by some similar contrivance. So they rejected the whole thing—which was a pity, since for once the phenomena were absolutely genuine.

Miss Soulsby continued to be a constant attendant at Mrs. Cumberbatch's séances, but never experienced the presence of Mr. Tilly again.

On this fact the reader may put any interpretation he pleases. It looks to me somewhat as if Mr. Tilly found something better to do.

THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM

ALDEBARAN and Alcor and Altair,
Aye, all the radiant planets swung in air,
How dim their lustrous light
Seems when the Bethlehem star ascends the night!

Although we see the glory of its gleams
But in our divination, in our dreams,
Forevermore for us
It makes the earth and heaven luminous.

Clinton Scollard

The Kiss at Large

A PROPHECIC STORY OF THE MEN AND WOMEN OF THE FUTURE

By Margaret Prescott Montague

I, GEORGE WEBSTER, have before me a most painful necessity, one which I would gladly avoid, were it not that in view of the very distressing and indeed alarming condition into which the country has fallen, I feel it incumbent upon me to throw what light I can upon the whole unfortunate affair. I can do so only by offering the following confession, which, I trust, may aid the authorities in overcoming the amazing epidemic now raging.

Let me begin at once, then, by saying that the whole thing originated on the 1st of last June—to be explicit, June 1, 2501.

Letitia objects to my fondness for dates. When I remind her that I am a practical man, and that in my opinion the giving of a date fixes and clarifies an event, she is apt to retort that I am not so much concerned with the clarifying of an event as with displaying my gift of accuracy. I do not agree with her in this. In the present instance, certainly, I think I am justified in calling attention to the date, as I wish it to be noted that the time mentioned is several days earlier than the first recorded case of the epidemic in question.

Let me repeat, then, that it was the afternoon of June 1, in the year 2501.

I was seated at my work, which that afternoon consisted of a thesis on the great nutritive value of the atmosphere distilled from boiled buttercups. I was specially anxious to have this ready for the great scientific meeting to be held the following month. I remember, however, that I was rather distracted from the careful weighing of buttercup atmosphere by meditating upon the cloud which had arisen to mar the happiness of our young friends, the Gregory-Andrews, who lived next door.

A month earlier it would have been difficult to find a happier pair than Edward

Andrew and Helen Gregory, and Letitia and I had derived no small enjoyment from contemplating their felicity. Then the quarrel had come, and their little bubble of happiness was pricked.

The situation disturbed Letitia more than it did myself. She said that it was the kind of situation which a few hundred years ago—say in the twentieth century—would have led to a divorce. I confess that I do not fully understand her, for the habits and customs of our dead and gone ancestors, no matter how amusing, have never interested me as acutely as they do her.

Even I, however, upon the afternoon in question, was conscious of some regret that the lovely month of June should have arrived to find happiness vanished from the dwelling of our next-door neighbors. It was at this point in my reflections that I was interrupted by the entrance of Letitia.

Her arms were full of odd little bundles, and on her face was that reposeful post-bellum expression with which I am so familiar, and which says unmistakably that she has fought, bled, and conquered. Sinking into a chair, she settled the bundles on her lap, and smiled at me.

I knew that she was going to explain. It was not in the least necessary for her to do so, for I was perfectly aware that she had been out in quest of antique customs. Nevertheless, I let her proceed, for to explain is one of her dearest privileges.

"I heard yesterday, George," she began, all in a breath—I have never been able to induce Letitia to copy my own repose of manner—"that old Biami had stumbled upon a really remarkable collection of ancient customs, which he would show to-day to some of his best patrons before offering them to any museum. I must admit," she added, "that Biami has always been very

good about giving me an early chance on anything particularly rare."

I confess I sighed a little, knowing well that old Biami's goodness was not altogether disinterested. However, I consoled myself with the thought that undeniably expensive as is this fad of Letitia's, she might easily have chosen something worse.

There is Elizabeth Wellwood, for instance. Her excursions into the antique lead her to collect embalmed germs of extinct diseases—insanity, cancer, typhoid fever, and hundreds more of those curious maladies from which our ancestors suffered. I should indeed have been sorry to have Letitia do this, as I am far from trusting an embalmed germ. Alas, little did I then realize the even greater danger to which we were soon to be exposed!

Letitia was radiant over her purchases, and wished to display them at once. Before allowing her to do so, however, I was careful to see that all the exits were securely closed. I took this precaution because on more than one occasion specimens from her collection have escaped from the house, and have caused us a good deal of unpleasant notoriety.

The most unfortunate of these occurrences, as I recall, was the escape of an old lady bestowing a penny upon a beggar. Once at large, this obsolete and objectionable performance multiplied to an alarming extent, and eluded capture for a week. I shall not soon forget the wrath poured out upon us when the authorities discovered that it was our strayed property which had occasioned such an outrageous epidemic of misplaced charity. They said, if my memory serves, that this form of weak-minded generosity had not been permitted at large since early in the twentieth century. I was appalled to learn from their carefully prepared report that our negligence had been the direct cause of inducing a disinclination toward work in four women and nine able-bodied men.

Therefore, as I say, I looked to the exits before allowing Letitia to open her bundles.

She had been very successful, having secured several most bizarre customs. There was, I remember, a President's hand-shaking reception, which must have belonged to the latter part of the nineteenth century, or very early in the twentieth. There was a President pressing a button to start an exposition—a form of summer mania which also originated about the nineteenth cen-

tury. There was, too, a multimillionaire—of what period I am not sure—making a public donation of some sort. This curious little specimen, upon being taken from its case, assumed at once the shape of a withered little old man in an amusingly quaint garb, consisting of a high straight hat and long coat hanging almost to the knees.

"That," said Letitia, indicating the specimen's strange headgear, "is what they used to call, I think, a 'frocks hat.'"

Letitia has made a deep study of the past, and is particularly well informed as to the dress of our ancestors. Once upon his feet, this quaint specimen began at once to bestow things—anything, anywhere, whether appropriate or not. Walking sedately across my work table, it bestowed Letitia's handkerchief solemnly upon the pile of freshly gathered buttercups which I had been analyzing. Then it placed both hands upon its little paunch, and bowed spasmodically. Evidently the echoes of long-forgotten applause were still ringing in its ears.

Letitia had also purchased a delightful little boy munching an apple. This, of course, was not a rare specimen, as it was hardly a hundred years ago that Micklejohn made his remarkable discovery of the nutriment in the earth's atmosphere, so that specimens of our ancestors partaking of food in this old-fashioned manner are common enough in collections. Indeed, Letitia has several of her own, one being a Thanksgiving dinner party in almost complete preservation, except that one or two of the small ring-shaped things called "doughnuts" have been broken. She also has something which she calls an "afternoon tea"—a strange specimen which makes such a deafening noise that I do not often encourage her to take it from its case.

This little boy of the past, however, ate his apple—which, by the way, as I was surprised to note, was small and green, though I had always supposed this fruit was not consumed except when much larger, and red—with such charming gusto that Letitia had been unable to resist him. Even I, in contemplating the lad, found myself envying our ancestors some of their rude old customs.

As Letitia watched the little boy finish his apple, skin and all, to the very last mouthful, she cried triumphantly:

"There, *that's* what they meant when they said, 'There ain't goin' to be no core.'"

I came across the expression in an old book, and I never knew how to translate it."

II

At last came the opening of a tiny box, which Letitia had reserved to the last. From the hushed manner in which she produced it, I guessed that I was about to see what she considered the gem of the whole collection.

Gently she shook the case, and there escaped from it a faint blue cloud, like a little curl of smoke, which floated lightly about the room.

"What is it?" I demanded, discreetly dodging the little mist as it wavered in my direction, for I admit that I am not without some apprehension in regard to these antiquities of Letitia's.

"This," said she, a ring of triumph in her voice, "is a kiss."

"A what?" I questioned, puzzled.

"A kiss," she repeated. "K, y, s—or no, I believe they spelled it with an i and doubled the s—k, i, double s. Don't you know what it is?"

"No, Letitia," I was forced to confess, "I'm afraid I don't. You know I'm not nearly so well informed in these matters as you are. What was the thing for?"

"It wasn't exactly *for* anything," she explained. "You just gave it to somebody you—you were fond of, you know."

"Oh!" I said, although I was still mystified. "And after they got it, what did they do with it?"

For some unaccountable reason Letitia was blushing faintly.

"Why," she said, "I think, when you received it, you—you nearly always gave it right back again—that is, if—you liked the person who gave it."

Now this seemed to me wholly ridiculous.

"But, my dear," I said logically, "if they just gave it right back to you, what in the world was the sense in ever giving it in the first place? Really, Letitia, I don't wish to disparage our ancestors, but you must admit they did have some amazingly useless customs. Pray, how did you give the thing?" I added.

"With—with the lips, I *think*," Letitia faltered.

Then I knew. I made a bound to see that all the exits were fast closed.

"Put it up, Letitia!" I cried. "Put it up at once! I remember all about it now. It's that frightfully dangerous thing that

the authorities suppressed early in the twenty-first century. You don't know *what* germs may still lurk in it! Here, sprinkle it with this," I cried.

Catching up a bottle of a strong disinfectant, a supply of which I always keep at hand, I attempted to spray some of the liquid upon the faint blue cloud; but the diabolical thing slipped airily aside from every attempt I made.

I do not often permit myself to become excited, but I confess there was something so annoying in the way in which this fantastic specimen eluded me that I found myself growing almost violent. Before I knew it, my work table had been upset, and several chairs had been kicked across the room. Letitia, I regret to say, was of no assistance whatever, as the whole situation seemed only to move her to foolish laughter.

Once I actually had the devilish little thing between my hands. Dashing it to the ground, I attempted to stamp violently upon it. It slipped from under my feet, however, blew impudently up in my face, and came within an ace of alighting upon my lips. Indeed, it would actually have done so, had I not instantly sprung to one side. In my haste I stumbled, and in endeavoring to save myself I plunged down rather abruptly upon the divan.

"Stop, George!" Letitia cried. "Oh, stop!" She was almost hysterical with laughter, which to me seemed wholly out of place at such a serious time. "Oh!" she said. "I knew it had a strange effect on people, but I never dreamed it was as funny as this! Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Wait now," she added, gaining some control of herself. "Keep perfectly quiet until I capture it."

Moving quietly, she cornered the kiss adroitly, and, blowing upon it, she managed to drive it back into its case.

"Poor little thing!" she murmured. "It looks as if it might be the ghost of one of those blue butterflies we see in the spring. I don't believe it's half as dangerous as people thought. I remember that when I was a little girl, my great-grandmother told me she had had one given to her when she was a young lady, and it didn't do her a bit of harm."

"Who gave it to her?" I demanded. "Your great-grandfather?"

"No-o, I think not," returned Letitia. "You see, poor dear grandpa was always so dreadfully afraid of catching things."

"Well, then," I said, "I suppose it was given to her by some feminine friend or relative?"

"Well, perhaps," said Letitia, but for some reason she seemed doubtful. "Anyway," she continued, "grandmother told me they were awfully frightened when it happened, because even then it was against the law; so just as soon as it was given to her, she gave it right back, as I think they nearly always did. Then they tried to catch it; but it had happened out of doors, and somehow it got away from them and blew off over the meadows, and they never saw it again. Grandmother told me that all her life she was haunted by the thought of that kiss roaming the country—and yet, somehow, she seemed to like the idea, too. Oh, George!" Letitia exclaimed in sudden excitement, hugging the little box close. "Perhaps—why, perhaps this is granny's kiss!"

I cannot say that I was greatly edified by the thought of this kiss having been originated by my great-grandfather-in-law. I requested Letitia to take the specimen away, and to lock it up with the rest of her treasures. She complied, but as she left the room I could see that she was disappointed over something. I was sorry that she should be; but, fond as I am of her, I have long since given up trying to account for all her vagaries.

III

AFTER straightening up the room, I settled once more to my work, having first, however, opened the windows. In spite of all that is said against it in the present day, and at the risk of being considered rather vulgar, I still have an old-fashioned fondness for fresh air.

I was hardly seated again, however, before I was annoyed by the sound of something falling sharply upon the floor—a sound which seemed to come from Letitia's room. There followed a moment's pause, and then I heard the wild scurry of Letitia's feet down the hall.

In an instant she burst in upon me. I had only time to notice that her eyes were all alight, and her cheeks amazingly pink, before she did a most astounding thing. Flinging both arms about my neck, she pressed her lips to mine.

Never have I experienced such a curious shock as went through my whole being as our lips met. The world seemed made over,

and I felt myself awakened to a new phase of life. So completely carried away was I by the ecstasy of the occasion that without a moment's hesitation I recklessly returned the salute. Then I looked into her eyes for an explanation.

"It's the kiss!" she gasped. "I dropped the box and broke it, and the kiss flew right up in my face against my lips before I could stop it; and—and then of course I came straight to you!"

"Of course," I said; though why it should have been a matter of course I am now somewhat at a loss to determine.

I confess that at this point I made a fatal mistake. I now know that I should at once have secured the dangerous thing and returned it to its captivity; but so intoxicated was I by the rapture of the new experience that I bestowed the little thing over and over upon Letitia.

Letitia was partly to blame, for as fast as I gave it to her, she returned it to me. This reprehensible but delightful interchange continued for some time, until suddenly a sharp gust of wind from the open door caught the blue kiss away from us and wafted it toward the window.

"Catch it! Oh, catch it!" Letitia cried.

I made a wild dive for it, but clawed only the empty air. The kiss slipped lightly between my fingers, and, spreading what looked like faint, misty wings, ballooned away out of the window. Lightly, airily, it sailed through the June sunshine straight toward the Gregory-Andrews' house.

I should like to believe otherwise, but I fear, as the kiss escaped my grasp, I heard a low, triumphant laugh from Letitia. I started instantly toward the door in hot pursuit, but she flung herself in my way.

"Wait! Oh, please wait!" she begged.

I know not what madness was upon me, but—I confess it with shame—with her arms about me, I allowed myself to be gently drawn toward the window overlooking our neighbors' garden. There, spell-bound, Letitia and I waited in breathless, guilty silence.

The Gregory-Andrews were in their garden. Helen Gregory was wandering aimlessly about, inspecting the flowers, while Edward Andrew was seated under a tree, apparently indifferent to her presence. It was an intensely clear day, and the little blue smoke curl of the escaped kiss was all too evident to my unhappy gaze. Softly, softly, it sailed into the garden. For a mo-

ment it hung above Helen's dainty head, bobbing there lightly in the breeze. Letitia, watching at my side, gave a little gasp of excitement.

Only for a moment did the kiss hover there, however, for all at once it was caught in a stronger gust and blown straight on toward the unconscious Edward. Letitia's breath came palpitatingly, and I was conscious of some excitement myself. Closer and closer the kiss drifted, until a last sharp gust of wind blew it full against Edward's lips.

Instantly an amazing change came over him. He straightened up abruptly, appearing to be startled and electrified. For a moment he looked about him, and then his gaze fell upon Helen. Leaping to his feet, he crossed the intervening space in great bounds, and, catching her in his arms, set his lips wildly to her hair, her forehead, and her mouth. At this last contact her look of astonishment changed to delight, and, flinging her arms about his neck, she—

But at this point Letitia dragged me from the window.

"Come away!" she whispered. "Come away! We mustn't look any more."

With a belated return of sanity I caught up my bottle of disinfectant.

"I'll run over with this and explain," I cried. "If they use it at once—"

To my amazement, Letitia dashed the bottle from my hand, so that it shattered to a thousand fragments.

"Disinfectants at such a time!" she cried.

"But, my dear," I protested, "think of the danger—"

"Danger! *Fiddlesticks!*" she retorted.

I may explain that this last curious exclamation is an archaic word which Letitia chanced upon in an old book, and which she reserves for moments of extreme emotion. I haven't the least idea what it means, and, classic expression as it may be, I must admit that it never fails to arouse in me a certain sense of annoyance. However, I saw that Letitia was in no mood to be crossed at that moment, and so I yielded weak-mindedly and left the escaped kiss to go its way.

Thus, through my own outrageous carelessness, as I now confess with shame, was the strange epidemic first started. Let me state clearly that this curious outbreak, which so far has completely baffled the authorities, is nothing more nor less than a

general attack of kissing, brought on by my negligence. The kiss, once at large, has apparently multiplied at an astounding rate, for certainly our one specimen could not account for the numberless cases which have been reported from all over the country. I am therefore forced to the conclusion that—

IV

At this point in my statement I was interrupted by Letitia's entering with the morning reel. As I had not seen the news, I paused while she slipped the reel into its socket and turned on the current. I was in haste to see how the gathering of eminent scientists at Blue Sulphur was progressing, so we ran hastily through the general news until we came to the pictures of the meeting.

As the pictures fell upon our screen, accompanied by the voices of the speakers, I saw that Professor Reginald Spielotski was in the act of addressing the distinguished assembly.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, in that falsetto voice of his which I have always found rather trying, "I have lately made an amazing discovery. I believe that quite by accident I have discovered the germ of ecstasy. With your permission, I should be glad to demonstrate its effect."

So saying, with such amazing quickness and precision of action that I was forced to the conclusion that he had planned the whole thing beforehand, the professor stepped forward, and, selecting the youngest and most beautiful woman member present, he stooped and *pressed his lips to hers*.

I had not dreamed what was coming. I confess that I was fairly electrified, while Letitia, beside me, gave a little shriek of mirth. The effect upon the whole meeting was amazing in the extreme. At the professor's salute, the lady member looked shocked and startled for an instant.

"How very interesting!" she exclaimed, recovering herself. "I should like to try the experiment myself."

Turning hastily away from Professor Spielotski, who looked surprised and chagrined, she pressed her lips suddenly and warmly to those of a fellow scientist beside her—a handsome young man of about twenty-five, who received and promptly returned the salute in what struck me as being anything but a scientific spirit.

Thereafter the meeting fell into a state of the wildest confusion. At first I was completely at a loss to account for the amazing situation, but in a moment the whole truth burst upon me.

"Why, Letitia," I cried, "it's the *kiss*! They're all kissing one another!"

"They are, George, they are!" she gasped. "You've said a mouthful!"

I realized that this last expression was another of the curious archaic phrases in which she delights. Evidently she was not taking the situation with proper gravity, being indeed in an almost hysterical mood, while I was deeply shocked and horrified.

Alas, a still more terrible thing was yet to follow!

The news reel flowed smoothly on through the alarming report of Professor Spielotski's so-called discovery to the morning picture of our beloved ruler, His Majesty the President, conducting a meeting of his Cabinet. To my perturbed mind it was a beautiful and refreshing sight to see his sublime highness enter with all the well-known dignity which so befits his exalted station, followed by the glorious members of his chosen body of ministers. I remember noting especially the great beauty and dignified serenity of Her Excellency the Secretary of Flowers and Butterflies, and thinking that, in spite of her youth, she was all that a woman in so elevated a position should be.

For a moment I feasted my eyes upon the superb sight, as I knew millions of other loyal spectators were also doing; but only for a moment. An instant after His Majesty the President was ceremoniously seated, there appeared a terrifying thing. A little blue curl of mist came floating airily in upon that honored scene. Terror took me by the throat and froze me. It could not be—and yet it *was*!

Softly, silently, the horror blew toward the throne. With a wild cry of anguish I sprang to my feet and sought to avert the catastrophe. Forgetting that the scene pictured before me was a thousand miles away, I shrieked a warning and blew violently upon the screen, endeavoring to turn the course of the diabolical fate driving straight toward our august ruler.

Of course, my outcries were useless. The impending disaster, released so carelessly from the past, hovered over his majesty's head for a moment, and then dived swiftly down upon his lips.

He straightened up, amazed. For one uncertain instant he glanced about him. Then his eyes lighted upon the beautiful Secretary of Flowers and Butterflies, and—

"He's a man! He's a man, after all!"

Letitia cried.

But I could bear no more. Leaping up, I dashed the reel to the floor, thus ending our sight of the dreadful catastrophe.

"Letitia!" I appealed wildly. "You *must* do something! Think! Surely you know how to put a stop to this awful situation! How did they catch the thing in the twenty-first century, when the authorities suppressed it?"

"Well," Letitia said, "surely even you can see that the kiss, once at large, and in its natural state, is always attracted to *sweet things*."

"Sweet things?" I questioned. "Such as honey, do you mean?"

"Yes, honey," she returned, with a curious tenderness in her tone which I did not understand.

Alas, I do not know whether or not she spoke in earnest! She has seemed all along so strangely unaffected by the dreadful seriousness of the affair; yet this suggestion of hers is all that I have to offer, and I make it public for what it may be worth.

I seem to have read, in one of Letitia's old books, that many centuries ago our ancestors were troubled by a little flying insect, which invaded their houses in the summertime. To catch and exterminate it, they spread out sheets of paper smeared with a sweet and sticky substance, which attracted the little pests in great numbers.

Something of this method might be of service in the present crisis. If honey were spread thickly upon fragment—which is our nearest equivalent to the paper of our ancestors—I cannot but hope that the flocks of kisses now flying through the country would be attracted to it, and might thus be caught and burned before spreading further contagion.

I implore the authorities to make a trial of this suggestion, or to take immediate steps to find some other means for putting a stop to this frightful condition. Otherwise the whole of present-day civilization will suffer an appalling fling back into the dark ages, and everything will be revolutionized. We shall begin to forgive our enemies, love our brothers—and even more, alas, our sisters—as ourselves, and the world will suffer an unthinkable collapse.

The Man of the Miracle

THE STRANGE STORY OF A MODERN MEDICAL MYSTERY

By Vance Thompson

Author of "Eat and Grow Thin," "The Carnival of Destiny," etc.

JOHN BARKER MACRAW, familiarly known as "J. B.," and Hiram Jenks are veterans of Wall Street, partners in the banking house of Jenks & Macraw. Saying that he will "be back in a few days," Jenks disappears, and his old friend and partner searches for him in vain. Following up a tip from Hiram's chauffeur, he goes to a house on West Eleventh Street. Here he finds a girl, Madelon Starr, who tells him that "Uncle Hiram," as she calls Jenks, is her dear friend, but that she does not know where he is.

One Sunday afternoon a stranger calls at Macraw's house near Gramercy Park—where old J. B., a childless widower, leads a lonely life largely devoted to his wonderful collection of scarabs. The visitor, Dr. Cree, informs the banker that Hiram Jenks is under his professional care, and invites Macraw to call and see the patient. J. B. goes to the doctor's establishment, where Cree declares that he can renew an old man's youth, and warns Macraw to prepare for a great change in his friend's appearance. The banker goes upstairs with the doctor and Miss Calamy, the nurse, and enters a room full of a strange light and a heavy odor.

VII

"IS he sleeping?" Dr. Cree asked softly. "Yes," came in a whisper from Miss Calamy.

"Good!" The doctor spoke now in an authoritative tone, incisive, compelling. "Turn that off."

The nurse touched one of the levers of the cabinet, and the wild light that had been leaping to and fro went out. What was left was a green glow, as of a pale emerald. Slowly it faded, changing to hueless daylight; and this, in turn, was stained with hints of rose-colored dawn—a beautiful light, the blazon of youth.

J. B. could see the naked room, the walls, and Dr. Cree leaning over the white thing in the corner.

"Good!" the doctor said again. "He will wake now."

Neither he nor the nurse had paid any attention to the old banker, who stood near the door, angry and suspicious, but shaken—for this house of spectral science was to him an unfamiliar battlefield. In spite of his hardened will, there was fear in his heart.

"Now, Miss Calamy!"

"Yes, doctor."

Ada went to the corner, where the doc-

tor stood, and drew away the white linen cloth that covered a high operating bed.

A man lay there. He was fully dressed—to his shoes, to his necktie with a pin in it, to the gold-rimmed eyeglasses that hung from a cord.

"Hiram!" J. B. cried, stumbling heavily forward.

"Gently, Mr. Macraw!" said Dr. Cree. "Give him a moment or two."

"Old Hiram!"

It was a cry from the heart, for J. B. loved him with the familiar love of half a century. And there he lay, in the braided coat and gray trousers, the wing collar parted under his chin, the rosy light on his dear old face.

The eyes opened—the wise eyes with the brown light in them. Slowly Hiram Jenks raised himself on his elbow and stared around the room. He seemed dazed, as if searching for some one who was very far off. At last his eyes fell on his partner.

"J. B.!" he shouted. "J. B.!" You dear old rascal!"

But J. B. had started back from the bed, a scream dying in his throat.

"My God!" he gasped out. "Your head!"

On the top of Hiram's head lay the toupee, masterpiece of the wigmaker's art,

but it hung askew, for underneath it a brown crop of hair had started up—hair thick and strong as youth; and atop of this the useless wig hung, wabbling.

The doctor did not speak. The nurse was silent. J. B., gasping, stared at the appalling head.

"Old J. B.!"

It was Hiram speaking. He seemed to have difficulty in placing his voice. He sat up and threw his legs over the bed. Then he stood up, stretching himself and breathing deeply. He stood so erect that he seemed taller, as a man is drawn taller by the pride of youth. He approached his friend, beaming with the love that was in him; but J. B. kept backing away.

A look of surprise—of grief—came over Hiram's face. He raised his eyeglasses and looked through them—shifted them up and down—tried them again. Then, with a laugh, he tore them loose, threw them on the wooden floor, and stamped on them with the violence of a maniac.

But what was most terrifying was the laughter of Hiram Jenks. There was in it the whinny of old age, but at the same time it was roaring and juvenile, as if a boy was laughing in an old man's throat.

"What's the matter with you? What's the matter with you?" J. B. shouted, as if he had caught Hiram's wild excitement.

"Matter with me? Youth!"

Again he emitted his frightful laughter. Snatching off the dangling wig, he threw it down and danced on it.

"Lunatic!" J. B. roared.

"Youth!" yelled Hiram.

"Lunatic!"

"Youth!"

Their heads thrust forward, they tried to shout each other down. It was like the brawling of schoolboys.

"Lunatic!" It was the only word J. B. could find.

"No, no, old J. B., it's not lunacy! It's youth—youth—youth! My God, I am young!"

He threw out his arms in a gesture that seemed to welcome a universe of spring-times and loves and flying kisses. His voice asserted itself. It was resonant, warm—just such a voice as he had affronted the world with back in the village of his boyhood; and yet now and then one of old Hiram's rustier tones struck across it.

After this first exultant outburst of mad joy he took himself in hand with all the

self-control that the grinding years had taught him. He laid his hand on his partner's shoulder. It was a familiar gesture, and one that J. B. had never tolerated from any one save Hiram. Indeed, it was the only mark of tenderness that ever passed between these two hard-jawed old men, who had sharpened their teeth on the stones of Wall Street for fifty years. It quieted J. B., bringing with it, as it did, all the old memories that knit them together in steadfast friendship.

But that hair—mouse-colored at the sides, where the old crop clung, with a short, upstanding brown brush atop! And that face, without the accustomed eyeglasses! Was it the rosy light in the room? The face of Hiram Jenks had the flush of youth. It was plumped out. The lines and wrinkles of time were washed away from it, and there were in it the strength and buoyancy of the Hiram that J. B. had known at twenty-five.

"Young, you old rascal—that's all! I've got back my youth, J. B.!" He glanced over his shoulder at Dr. Cree and the nurse. "These are the people who have done it for me. I thank them from the bottom of my heart!"

The doctor came forward, a smile of professional candor on his red lips.

"I warned you, Mr. Macraw," he said, "that he was—er—changed; but after all you did know him!"

"I know he's always been fool enough for anything," J. B. answered grimly.

He eyed the blooming Hiram with disfavor, and wondered whether he himself were really envious of this old fool, who had been drugged or mountebanked into a fatuous kind of youth, with rosy cheeks and toothbrush hair.

"I know what you want, J. B.," said Hiram, "and what you need—a cigar—and so do I."

"Sure you haven't gone back to lollipops?" J. B. tartly returned. "You're so young, eh?"

Hiram's laugh came again, merry and juvenile; but in the end it broke into the whinny with which, in the later years, J. B. had been more familiar.

"We'll go down to my study and have those cigars," the doctor remarked; "but first—permit me, Mr. Jenks—"

He took Hiram's wrist and felt the pulse, gravely, nodding his handsome head. Then he beamed.

"Right as can be! Going as strong as when you were five and twenty," he went on; "as indeed you are now!"

"To a day," Mr. Jenks replied gayly.

As he went down the stairs with his partner and his physician, he chuckled triumphantly to himself, squaring his shoulders and throwing out his rejuvenated legs.

Once in the reception room, old J. B. sat down gloomily in the chair near the table, and took up the jade scaraboid. The mere touch of it gave him a sense of security in this world of science that was rocking under his feet. The jade, at least, was real and unmistakably old.

Hiram walked lightly to and fro, proud of his legs; and Dr. Cree was saying:

"As a medical man, I am going to prescribe for you both—and for myself—sherry! Doctor's orders!"

He rang for Claude Allingham and ordered glasses. While waiting for the boy's return, he passed the cigars and got out a bottle of sherry.

J. B. was lighting his cigar when the lad came back, carrying in front of him—as a monkey holds a coconut—a tray with wine-glasses; but he let the match burn out in his fingers. Claude was wearing a white jacket, but no apron. From the sleeves his long arms protruded. They were whiter than his face—a sallow white, with spots of grayish yellow; and to J. B. they seemed still more shocking than the bleached face itself.

"Put it on the table, Claude," said the doctor.

The boy came within a few feet of Mr. Macraw as he placed the tray on the table. His face was on a level with J. B.'s eyes. It was a tragic face. His solemn eyes met those of the old banker, and there was in them something more awful than fear. It was hard to understand, and harder still to explain, but J. B. felt that he was looking into something that was terrified because it knew itself to be unnatural—beyond the sane laws of life—horrible as madness is horrible.

He glanced from the boy to his old friend, and realized that he had a similar feeling about Hiram, as if Jenks, too, was unclean with the unnatural, soiled by some venture beyond the limits of sanity.

"Get out!" he shouted to Claude. "For Heaven's sake, sit down!" he added, to Hiram Jenks. "Don't prance about there like—like a lunatic!"

Hiram was turning himself about, bending and straightening up his flexible body before a cheval glass, smiling into the mirror to display his teeth and admire his young, conquering face. He was bubbling with satisfaction and conceit, as he came and sat down by old J. B.

"Of course you're surprised, you old rascal," he said genially. "So am I; but I've seen it coming day by day, and for months I've known it was coming. A slow treatment"—he drank his sherry—"that was Dr. Cree's advice—slow and sure. Then for the last two weeks or so we've been at it day and night. I should have let you know, J. B., but you wouldn't have understood. It isn't the sort of thing you could see half done; but now that it is done—"

He jumped up and dashed over to the mirror.

"The hair won't do like this, doctor! You must get in a barber. He can even it up, at least, and perhaps touch up the sides. There's a suspicion of gray."

"Suspicion!" J. B. growled. "You'd be gray as a badger if you hadn't been dyeing your old head for years!"

"The natural color is coming back," said the doctor. "In a few days there will be no difference between the old hair and the new."

"But I must be trimmed up!"

"I'll see to it," Dr. Cree promised; "but just now I think, perhaps, Mr. Macraw—"

"To be sure! It's worrying you, J. B.—I see it; but how could I let you know?"

"Write," J. B. replied.

"And tell you that I was twenty-five years old? You had to see for yourself."

"Well, I've seen, and so far I don't like it," the old man retorted.

In the sane summer light, still unfaded, he could clearly perceive the change that had been wrought in old Hiram Jenks; and yet this was the Hiram he had known so long. The familiar hot-tempered eyes were Hiram's eyes. His, too, the high, impulsive voice, and the smile in which J. B. had always seen too much self-applause. Moreover, he recognized old Hiram's way—that exasperating air, as if he were saying:

"Of course I'll succeed—I have a lucky star!"

Old Hiram, all right—but where had his paunch gone? And the lean legs? And the withered throat?

The man there in the braided coat and wing collar, fiddling with his watch chain

in the familiar way, had lost the stigmata of old age. He was straight and strong. The muscles answered swiftly to the call of the will. The skin was clear, and rather high in color.

"Damn it, the fellow really seems to have got back to five and twenty!" J. B. said to himself.

This was the Hiram he had known in his own youth, when first success had come to them; when they shared their dreams and ambitions; when Hiram pranced about, just so, in the drawing-room, then new, in the house near Gramercy Park, and a young bride laughed at him. Long ago the young bride was dust, and—until this strange hour brought her back to memory—almost forgotten. J. B. was an old, old man, near the end of the journey; while this fellow—this Hiram fellow—capered there like a young goat, defiant of the law that makes old age the vestibule of death!

"And the teeth," he heard the doctor explaining. "Well, you will have to carry on with the gold for a while, Mr. Jenks; but we shall see, we shall see! The third dentition—that is, the third set of teeth—should come normally when you are eighty-five years old. You'll have them in less than fifteen years."

"Hiram!"

"Yes, J. B."

"While we've been about this hanky-panky, what the devil do you suppose became of that M. and M. C. R. matter? I'm not going to lose by it, merely because of your—"

He hesitated for a mild word.

"Youth," interposed Hiram. "All right, J. B.—I'm sorry. What did I do with that deed? It's been an exciting time, J. B.! I meant to leave it for you with Pickering. Did I sign it? By Jove, J. B.—"

He dived into the pocket of the braided coat and drew out a long, flat letter case.

"Of course I signed it!" he exclaimed. "I forgot to leave it for you. Here it is, J. B."

The old banker took it, carefully scrutinized the signature, and put the paper in his pocket.

"It may not be too late," he grumbled ungraciously. "If it is, you'll pay!"

He seemed to take no pleasure in the miracle of science that had given him back a rejuvenated Hiram. Perhaps the deepest feeling in him was disgust. He pulled himself stiffly out of the chair.

"Coming back to the office?" he asked gruffly.

"To-morrow," replied Hiram.

"Looking like that?" J. B. growled at him.

"What do you mean?"

"Go look at yourself. Old Pickering would heave you out of the window, if you tried to get into your office!"

For the first time there came into Hiram's face an expression of uneasiness—the same sort of indescribable terror that J. B. had seen in the bleached face of the negro boy.

"Good God!" he exclaimed brokenly. "What if they don't know me?"

VIII

HIRAM's head had been trimmed by the barber, but he was compelled to make the best he could of the braided suit. By buckling back the waistcoat, and belting in the trousers around his lean flanks, he did very well. The wing collar was a tight fit for his plumped-out neck, but he had managed to bring the ends together.

Claude Allingham had valeted him, and Mr. Jenks treated the timid boy with a great deal of kindness. To him, evidently, there was nothing repugnant in the bleached, abnormal face. Indeed, he may have felt for Claude a touch of freakish kinship.

Having dined early, according to a régime devised by his medical man, Mr. Jenks left the sanatorium and walked out into the streets of New York. His way led him down Madison Avenue. He walked rapidly, taking rather long strides for a man of his height. He carried a bamboo stick with a silver head, and a dangling pair of gloves.

He was not a conspicuous man, as he strode along in the dusk of day, and yet almost every one he met glanced at him in passing. There seemed to be something about him that attracted attention. It may have been the impression he gave of a man who was bent upon some ardent and formidable affair, at that evening hour which is made for idleness.

He noticed that he was not passing unobserved, and began to walk more slowly. The lighted window of a flower shop caught his eyes. He entered and bought a flower for his buttonhole, choosing a half opened rose. It was a tribute to youth—or to memory; and he lighted a cigar.

He traversed Madison Square—it was nearly deserted, and day was dying—and went down Fifth Avenue. When he came to the old church, he paused a moment and glanced around him. Then he walked on more briskly, and turned into Eleventh Street.

There were welcoming lights in the decorous house of Miss Starr. As he waited for the opening of the door, Hiram Jenks looked at his watch. Eight o'clock! He had kept his appointment to the minute. As he entered Madelon's drawing-room, the church bells rang the hour.

There were three people in the room. They sat near one another, as if in conference. For a second or two no one spoke. Mr. Jenks drew himself up, and confronted the silence with angry embarrassment.

At last a harsh voice shouted:

"Hello-o!"

Hiram gave a sudden start, and faced about toward the curtained window.

"Hello-o!"

The parrot stopped abruptly. He scanned Mr. Jenks with a malignant eye, then cocked his head and inspected him with the other eye—equally malignant. At last he tried again.

"Hello!" he said distinctly. "Hello-o, what's the use?" he rasped out rapidly.

With that Coco shrugged his shoulders despairingly and flopped down on the lowest rung of his perch.

J. B.'s derisive laughter rang out.

"That's what he thinks of you, Hiram?"

Dr. Cree laughed more discreetly.

"You'll surprise more than a parrot," he remarked pleasantly.

Hiram went toward Madelon Starr. Dr. Cree had got to his feet when his patient entered, but she had not moved. She was sitting in a low chair. As this young-old man drew near she gave a little, shuddering cry and covered her face with her hands.

"Madelon!" Hiram said reproachfully. He spoke as one deeply hurt.

"Steady, Miss Starr, steady!" interposed Dr. Cree.

He comforted the girl with his warm, professional voice, and touched her soothingly on the shoulder. J. B., too, had his word.

"Look at him! Been dyeing the rest of his hair! Look at him!" he cried jeeringly. "That's what he's here for, eh?"

Still the girl cowered low in her chair, with covered face. Mr. Jenks, with growing anger, stared down at her.

"Don't be silly!" he rapped out. Anger had brought back the high, nasal tones that old Hiram was wont to use in moments of stress.

"Madelon, I say! Take your hands away from your face! What do you mean by it?"

There was anxiety in Dr. Cree's mobile face as he bent toward Miss Starr—professional anxiety. It did not vanish when he glanced now and then, swiftly, at old J. B., who was grimly watching the scene.

"It has been hard to make her understand," the doctor explained. "Listen, Miss—er—Starr. Surely I have prepared you for this extraordinary, this wonderful—er—improvement in Mr. Jenks's appearance? There is nothing to be frightened about. You can trust me, Miss Starr. I have given you my word as a doctor, a man of science—my professional word; and you are very unkind to Mr. Jenks. Look up, Miss—er—Starr!"

She half withdrew her hands.

"No, no, I can't! Oh, what have you done? I'm afraid of him. I want my own old Uncle Hiram. I—"

"Stop it, Madelon! This is no time for hysterics," admonished Hiram. "Heaven knows I've been through worry enough, and danger enough. I never knew whether I'd come out of it alive. I've stood about all I can. What's the matter with me? I'm myself, I suppose!"

The girl was plainly trying to get herself in hand. She looked at Hiram with frightened eyes, and her lips trembled.

"If this is the way they prepared you, I don't think much of them—no, I don't. See, Madelon, Dr. Cree has given me back my health and strength—"

"And youth," the doctor put in. "His youth!"

"Any one would think I'd committed a crime," Hiram said savagely, and glared at J. B.

"There are worse things than crimes," J. B. growled. "Silly things, idiot things, lunatic things—bah!"

"Don't blat!" Hiram retorted.

He turned to Madelon and caught her hands in his. His voice softened. Old Hiram's senile sharpness went out of it.

"Now, you are not going to be silly. Am I so terrible? Come!"

"Of course I know you are—are—Uncle Hiram; but oh, why did you? I wanted you as you were!"

"I am just the same, Madelon."

"Your eyes have not changed."

"You would have known me anywhere?"

"When you speak, of course; but your face is so—so young and so strong!"

Madelon stood up and looked into the face that bent down to her. It had not only the flush of youth, but, as she had said, youth's strength; and there was kindness in it—unchanged friendliness.

"Oh, but, Mr. Jenks, I shall never dare to call you Uncle Hiram!"

"Well, Jenks, I hope you're satisfied,"

J. B. said. "Anyway, I am."

"What do you mean?"

"Sit down, both of you, for I've more than one thing to say, and I mean to say them. You saw what that parrot thought of you, didn't you? I did. And Miss Starr—she didn't welcome you like an old friend, did she? Uncle Hiram! No, you nearly frightened the wits out of her, and she doesn't look to me like a young woman easily frightened. Dr. Cree had been talking to her for an hour—explaining it and warning her and reassuring her; but in spite of all that she took on like a kitten in a fit. Don't you interrupt me, Hiram Jenks! You listen to me! Now I'm not going to have Pickering and Lane and the rest of 'em throwing fits when you come into my bank."

"Yours!" Hiram exclaimed.

"Ours, then; but I don't think you can come into it after this hankypanky business. Man, go look at yourself. You my partner? Bah!"

"That's just what I am, and don't you forget it, old J. B.!"

"Try it on. Go to the bank."

"Precisely what I shall do to-morrow morning."

"Huh! What do you think they'll say? I haven't any partner who goes cockering round like a young lunatic of five and twenty. Who'd believe you? By Heaven, if I hadn't seen it done, I wouldn't believe it myself. And that's what I have to say to you, Hiram Jenks."

"But has he changed so much as all that?" Dr. Cree asked in his conciliatory way. "Of course, I have seen Mr. Jenks every day—I have followed the process, as it were—and marked the gradual resurrection, as I might call it, of youth. Naturally the difference strikes you more forcibly—you and Miss—er—Miss Starr—who have only seen him when the cure was per-

fect. To me he merely seems to be Mr. Jenks, younger of course—"

"Younger! He's young enough to be his own son!" J. B. broke in scornfully.

Madelon laughed suddenly. It was laughter as unexpected to her as it was to every one else; but it was not unwelcome. After all these violent emotions it brought a sense of calm, as if a tension had been removed.

"I laughed because one can't be one's own son," she explained apologetically.

"Or can one?"

"I'm sorry, J. B.," said Hiram. "I am not quite myself."

"You haven't lost your nasty temper."

"I mean I'm upset. You might make allowances for an old friend who finds himself in this situation. You might try to help him, instead of sneering like a—"

Hiram could find no adequate simile. "I begin to see the difficulty as clearly as you do. That was very clever of you, J. B. I do look like my own son—if I had one."

"That doesn't help any, Hiram."

"Why not, J. B.? So far as Jenks & Macraw are concerned, I'll be my own son."

J. B. smothered an exclamation. Before answering his partner, he gave himself time to think. After all, the only living thing he cared for was Hiram Jenks, and, in spite of the preposterous thing that old Hiram had done to himself, the stanch affection held good.

He had never liked Hiram's personal vagaries. He had always despised his opinions—which was not quite fair, as Hiram took all his opinions from a very reliable evening newspaper. But he loved Hiram's business interests; he loved Hiram's inexplicable money-getting sense; he loved Hiram as a partner in the subtle and grasping firm of Jenks & Macraw.

Now that Hiram had hankypankied himself into this predicament, J. B. would have to help him out. It was inevitable; but—outside of business hours—what a silly ass the fellow was!

"There might be something in that," he said reflectively; "but how would you explain yourself? To old Pickering, for instance, who has known all about you for a generation or so. You couldn't fool him into believing that any woman ever married you."

Hiram, too, was thoughtful. He had a melancholy look, as if he saw the door of Jenks & Macraw shut in his face.

"But surely," Dr. Cree interposed with his most reasonable air, "it should be quite easy to explain to the employers and clients of your bank that Mr. Jenks has been scientifically treated for the malady of old age! I can testify. I can vouch. The word of science spoken by me can hardly be questioned, I think. Youth," he went on, raising his voice and waving his hand to and fro, "youth—I've given it to him, and you have no right—pardon me, Mr. Mac-craw, pardon me, Mr. Jenks—you have no right to concealment. This is my victory, and I shall give it to the world. 'Look at Mr. Jenks!' I shall say to all the world. 'What I have done for him I can do for you, old men and old women before your time. I can give you back your youth!' If they doubt me, I need only repeat: 'Look at Mr. Jenks!' No, sir, you are not your son, not even for business purposes. You are my scientific triumph, my splendid victory over senile decrepitude. You are yourself!"

"If you are to be a walking advertisement for Dr. Cree," J. B. said with open disgust, "a walking, capering, lunatic advertisement for hankypanky, you can't come into the bank. Try a lunatic asylum, Hiram!"

Mr. Jenks had shown no enthusiasm for the picture Dr. Cree had drawn. Indeed, he took J. B.'s side of the dispute.

"That is impossible, of course, Dr. Cree. A man in my position can't do that sort of thing. I must appeal to your professional honor, Dr. Cree. I am not to be made a show of—an advertisement. That is quite impossible. It would be a derogation to your dignity as the greatest scientific discoverer of the age. No, Dr. Cree—for a man like you there are better things than cheap-Jack advertising."

"There's money, for instance," suggested J. B. unpleasantly.

"Whatever money Dr. Cree will accept is his. He may write a check for the amount; but money is not all. The satisfaction of doing your duty, Dr. Cree—that is more than money to you, I am sure," Hiram concluded persuasively.

Dr. Cree exhibited no lively signs of acquiescence, however.

"And let me remind you, doctor, that I am still your patient—that is, my case is still in your hands. I want you to follow up the case. I shall feel safer under your care."

"I yield," agreed Dr. Cree, without enthusiasm. "What else can I do? But when the time comes for me to make public this extraordinary case—"

"Then we'll cross that bridge, doctor," Hiram interjected. "You must trust me, as I trusted you when I put my life in your hands."

"Well, that's settled," J. B. said. "And now?"

"I think it would be perfectly lovely for Mr. Jenks—"

"Uncle Hiram, Madelon."

"Uncle Hiram, then," she repeated docilely. "I think it would be perfectly lovely for you to be your own son."

"Only for business purposes, I suppose you mean," said J. B. suspiciously.

Hiram Jenks had evidently thought it out. He paid no attention to his old partner's sneering remark.

"I don't see what else we can do for the present, J. B. I'll go to the bank properly accredited—with power of attorney and everything necessary. In fact, I have already taken a few such precautions; and you can easily explain that I have been sent away for my health."

"What asylum?"

"And that this young man who is taking my place is, in fact, my son, or nephew. I think son is better. I shouldn't like to trust a mere nephew with our business affairs, J. B. With your coöperation and good will, old J. B., it will be a perfectly simple matter. It isn't Pickering's business—it's only yours and mine. And if you are content—"

"Content!" J. B. roared.

"It was really your own suggestion."

In a way it was; and at last the banker gave in. He had been giving in to Hiram for so many years that it had become almost a habit first to bluster and then to consent.

Moreover, anything might happen, he told himself. The hankypanky might wear off, the new hair suddenly fluff away, and old Hiram, foxy and bald and decrepit as before, come back again. One never knew. People went to Lourdes and shouted that they were healed and threw away their crutches—only to buy new ones when they got home.

Above all, he wanted his partner, who attracted money like a magnet, back in the bank—even camouflaged as he was. He yielded to Hiram, as he had so often done

before; but in his cynical old mind there was born a germ of vengeance for all the trouble the eccentric old fellow had put him to.

"All right, old Hiram-Scarum!" he said. "Have it your own way; but, by Heaven, I'll tell everybody you are illegitimate!"

IX

"You are early, Mr. Macraw."

"Yes, Pickering. Come into my office—say in five minutes. I've something to say to you."

"Yes, Mr. Macraw."

To Pickering the five minutes seemed very long. He wondered anxiously what the great banker wanted to see him about. He was no longer the brisk young man who had come into the business years ago. He had grown old with it, but had made no headway. Indeed, he had dropped down, with the years, from post to post, until he found himself a mere watcher at the door.

He liked to be considered their man of confidence; but after all what was he, for Jenks & Macraw, but a sort of aged office boy, sitting in an outer office, waiting for a bell to ring? How long would they go on paying him his comfortable little salary for such petty work as he was doing? He tried to persuade himself that he was invaluable for the discretion with which he took in the cards of the right kind of people and turned away the worthless; but in his heart he felt that he was oldish and timid, and that his usefulness was wearing out. Perhaps this was what Mr. Macraw had in mind.

The coming interview frightened Pickering. He had always feared Mr. Macraw. With Mr. Jenks it was different. Mr. Jenks had brought him into the bank in those days so long ago. They shared common memories—the same background of youth in a village, whence Hiram had come up to town, vehement and unconquerable, to rape a fortune out of Wall Street. Mr. Jenks would stand by him.

With this hope he comforted himself as he waited for the long five minutes to run past. Then he knocked discreetly at the door, and entered.

J. B. was sitting at his desk. For a moment he stared coldly at the smallish, oldish man of confidence. Then he said:

"Mr. Jenks has gone away. He will not be back for some time."

"Yes, sir," Pickering replied automatically, in his usual respectful manner.

His throat was dry, and the floor seemed to rock under his feet. It had come! Mr. Jenks had gone away without giving him a word, and Mr. Macraw was going to have his way with him. If it didn't mean dismissal, what could it mean? He tried to keep his head up, but his eyes were unhappy and old.

"His health," J. B. added abruptly.

Pickering could only repeat his respectful "Yes, sir," and wait.

"Is Mr. Lane here?"

"Yes, sir."

The old banker spoke over the house telephone. Until the cashier answered the summons there was silence—a menacing silence, it seemed to Pickering—in the room.

Mr. Lane came in quickly, staring expectantly through his bifocal glasses. He always had an air of being a trifle surprised. Perhaps it was due to his spectacles, or to his eyebrows, which were unnaturally blond, as if the color had been washed out of them, while the hair above was of a dark chestnut hue. Below the curious eyebrows—and the twinkling glasses—was a long nose, bent at the tip. Withal Mr. Lane had good teeth, and, when he needed it, an ingratiating smile.

The ingratiating smile appeared in response to J. B.'s sharp word of greeting.

"I've just told Pickering," the old banker went on, "that Mr. Jenks is taking a long holiday from business, on account of his health. There will be no changes—"

Pickering's face brightened until he caught the next word.

"No changes," J. B. continued, "except that—"

He picked up a lead pencil, and examined it as if it was a new and unclassified creation. At last he looked keenly at the two men and added:

"Except that his son, Mr. Jenks, Jr., will come into the bank and take charge of his father's affairs. That is all. You may go, Mr. Lane. Young Mr. Jenks and I will arrange matters with you later this morning. I merely wished you to know. Good morning!"

He kept his eyes on the cashier until that functionary was out of the room, and Mr. Lane had no opportunity of turning his startled spectacles upon the face of the old man of confidence. In silence, solitary, he took his surprise with him out into the bank—and with his coming the bank buzzed feverishly.

Pickering stared, round-eyed, at the hard old banker at the desk. His relief over the fact that what had come from Mr. Macraw was not dismissal, or a reduction of salary, was swallowed up in an amazement too wild for words.

"His son!" he exclaimed finally. "You didn't say his son, sir?"

"Why not? Why didn't I say it, eh?"

"But Mr. Jenks has no son, sir!"

"I told you, Pickering, that Mr. Jenks's son would be here this morning. Can you get that through your head? See that Mr. Jenks's office is ready for him. What are you googling at? When I say that Mr. Jenks's son will be here, he will be here. When I say that Mr. Jenks has a son, then Mr. Jenks has a son."

Old J. B. seemed to take a cruel kind of pleasure in dominating the aged office boy; but it might have been merely that his own nerves were a little on edge, and that he was steadying himself by bullying the unhappy Pickering.

"Yes, sir—of course, Mr. Macraw; but I did not know, sir, that Mr. Jenks was married. It is such a surprise, and I've known him so many years," Pickering stammered, all fear and distress and amazement.

J. B. relented, and came as near an apology for his brusqueness as he could.

"I understand, Pickering." Then a smile showed on his lean old face. "His son, I told you, Pickering," he said grimly; "but I did not tell you that Mr. Jenks was married."

"Oh, sir!"

What brain poor old Pickering had was swirling in his poor old head. It was awful, and the most awful thing about it was that Mr. Macraw, that aloof man of financial dignity, had said it—and said it with a smile of comprehension. The plain fact that Mr. Macraw did not seem to be shocked horrified him almost as much as this appalling revelation that Hiram Jenks had a son—and was not married.

It was all horrible and mysterious. Pickering felt as if he had never known J. B.—as if this was some one else—as if he had never known Mr. Jenks. They had revealed themselves, like people in a play. A son! Not married! And Mr. Macraw was grinning!

Pickering tried to back away into his den outside, but his legs would not move for him, and he could not take his eyes off the old man at the desk, with the lean face and

the malicious smile. He was still standing there when the door was thrown violently open and Hiram Jenks entered, with Dr. Cree behind him. A smile was on the young man's lips, morning was in his eyes.

"How d'y'e do, Mr. Macraw?" he said. "Nice day! This must be Pickering?"

Never very tall, the renewal of his youth seemed to have straightened him up. He was a compact and handsome man, alert and vigorous, with a sort of willful vivacity about him which was singularly attractive. He looked at Pickering in a kindly way that moved the timid old man.

What Pickering saw first was the kind brown eyes—quick-tempered, willful eyes—and the friendly smile. A little of his own youth seemed to come back to him, as the young man came toward him and tapped his shoulder in Hiram's familiar way. His own youth came back to meet this buoyant figure that appeared to come down out of the springtime of long ago.

Mr. Jenks's son? Aye, that explained it; Pickering thought that this might have been his old friend and master—the dear, quarrelsome, self-reliant, impatient conqueror who waged money battles in Wall Street back in the last century, when both of them were young.

"You are very like him, sir," Pickering said at last.

"Yes—Mr. Hiram is like his father," J. B. agreed.

He, too, had been studying the active youth who spoke with his old partner's voice. He, too, was carried back to the vanished days. Pictures of Hiram boasting in the office, of Hiram leaning over a piano, singing long-forgotten songs with his young bride, woke in J. B.'s memory.

The fellow had always had his own way. Hot-headed, selfish, tenacious, he had always had his own way—and now he had cheated time! He had stolen a second period of youth, thanks to that hanky-panky fellow; and of course the fellow was keeping an eye on his prodigy.

"Sit down, Dr. Cree," said J. B.

"Thank you, Mr. Macraw," the doctor answered; but he kept his place near the door—dignified in bearing, modest, yet triumphant—and watched his prodigy.

"The governor told me a great deal about you, Pickering. I know how he depends on you. You'll help me out, I hope?"

"Oh, sir, in anything!"

"Of course I call him 'the governor'—

'pater,' sometimes," Hiram went on, with a glance of amused complicity at old J. B. "Father' sounds a bit too formal—but perhaps it would be more respectful, Mr. Macraw. Anyway, the dear governor has given me a lot of things to do, and the sooner I get to work the better. Of course, that's his office. There are some papers for you, Mr. Macraw. I'll get them."

"Very well, I'll go with you," J. B. returned, rising slowly.

The vivacity of this young-old man annoyed him; and yet that was just the kind of a buoyant ass his partner had been in the old days. J. B. realized, to his own deep disgust, that he was envious of this resurrected youthfulness and outgoing energy. His left leg was stiff, and rheumatism tweaked at it, as he got to his feet. Old age!

Hiram had gone straight to the door of his private office. He halted there and told Pickering that he could see no one that morning, as he would be very busy.

He went into his room, and his partner and Dr. Cree followed.

"Where the devil is that rose?" he asked hastily.

"I threw it away. It stank," replied J. B.

"You might have left my office alone!"

Now that Pickering was out of hearing, Hiram let himself go in his usual impatient way. He sat down at the writing table, took out his bunch of keys, and unlocked the middle drawer.

"Here are those Georgia papers. I've passed on the estimates, J. B., but I wish you'd go over them. They should be signed by the first of the month," Hiram said.

He was taking out various papers, glancing at them, and laying them in an order of his own on the table.

"I want to go into that," J. B. replied.

He pulled up a chair and sat by his partner's side. In the absorbing interest of business he forgot Hiram's hankypanky and his own feeling of envy; and, together, they took up swiftly the complicated affairs which had been held in abeyance during Hiram's absence. Dr. Cree withdrew discreetly to the window and stared down into the street below. It was the place, he knew, where money was made.

Suddenly the partners raised their voices in argument.

"I gave it to you, J. B.!"

"You did not!"

Hiram fumbled among the papers in the drawer, grumbling. At last he jumped up and went over to his private safe. He twirled the knob rapidly, until the combination for opening the safe was made, and then he pulled open the door. A moment later he exclaimed:

"I'm sorry, J. B.—you were right!" He left the safe open and went back to his table, the looked-for document in his hand. "I was sure I had given it to you."

"Well, you hadn't. I'm an old man, Hiram, but I've still got my memory."

"Of course you have, J. B. By the way, I'll call Lane in. We might as well do it now. I want my account made over to—to me!" He laughed. "That sounds funny, J. B., doesn't it? I'll be getting myself mixed up with myself, if I don't look out. What I mean is that my father has given full authority to his son. I thought a power of attorney would be the best thing, and here it is."

"I've told Lane that Mr. Hiram Jenks, Jr., would take charge of your affairs. It's a silly business, but have it your own way."

There was no surprise on Mr. Lane's long-nosed face. He had got over that; but curiosity twinkled in his spectacles as he greeted the new son of the house of Jenks & Macraw.

"How d'ye do, Lane? Father has often spoken of you—spoken well of you. I am going to try and carry on for him—er—during his absence."

Mr. Lane displayed respectful concern.

"You may file this authorization," said J. B. "Bear in mind that young Mr. Jenks is acting in his father's place—in everything."

"Yes, Mr. Macraw, thank you—yes, Mr. Jenks," the cashier replied, his pale eyebrows arched up to show that he was all attention.

"You may send me in some money, Lane—a thousand, to go on with," Hiram said.

Mr. Lane hurried out. Jenks unlocked a lower drawer and took out his check book.

"I might as well draw a check," he added, dipping his pen in the ink well. "By the way, what's the date, J. B.? I've been through so much that I don't even know the day of the month. Is it the 22nd?"

He filled out the check rapidly and dashed in his signature. It was a pompous signature, like that of Charles Dickens, who scrawled thirteen lines underneath the

"Dickens" to show what he really thought of himself, or that of Edison, who draws a big ballooning curve over his name as a mark of his inherent modesty. Hiram's signature ended in a flourish of curved lines—as if he was throwing out a lasso to capture the admiration of mankind.

"Let me see that!" J. B. demanded sharply.

He took up the check and examined it. Then he turned his cold red eyes on Hiram Jenks.

"What the mischief is this?"

He looked once more at the writing, and then again at the rejuvenated, aggressive face of his partner.

"That? My signature."

"It looked like it at first, but what's the matter with it?" J. B. persisted.

Hiram's answer was a burst of frank laughter, which ended, of a sudden, in the senile cackle that had been for years his way of showing amusement.

"How interesting!" Dr. Cree exclaimed, joining them at the table. "How very interesting! May I see it? You are right, Mr. Macraw. That doesn't look like an old man's writing, does it? There is no trace of the pathologic tremor, as we call it, of senile handwriting. I might have foreseen it! Of course, there is a psychic side to the pen gestures of writing, but the main influence is anatomical and physiological. Now the hand of Mr. Jenks is twenty-five years old, for all practical purposes; so what did you expect, Mr. Macraw?"

Hiram had opened one of the mahogany cabinets and extracted a bundle of yellowing documents dating back to his youth. He laid them on the table in front of his lifelong partner, and pointed out his name written again and again.

"What about it, J. B.?"

The flashing, pompous signature of Hiram Jenks, which he had just written, was, except for the addition of a "Jr.," identical with his signature of five and forty years ago. His very handwriting had recovered its youth.

"And a lucky thing, too, J. B. It wouldn't do if my signature," Hiram said, with his queer chuckle, "was just the same as—father's!"

X

"FIVE don't make a good dinner party, Dan," Hiram was saying, as he looked at the table in his dining room; "but I didn't

want any one else to-night. Those flowers are all right, Dan."

"They sure are," said Dan. "What are them little boxes?"

"Souvenirs," Hiram replied.

"I warned 'em downstairs in the restaurant," Dan explained. "I told the chef himself that you weren't as easy pleased as your father used to be, and that he'd better look slipper. He's wise to it now, all right! Dinner will be up at eight thirty. The only waiter who will come into the room will be Paul. I told 'em what you thought of the other fellow. Me, too. He walks like a turf boat; but he can't help it. He's one of them Irish Irish, God help him! Timmins 'll be at the door to let 'em in."

"Thanks, Dan. It's time you were off now. You'll call at Dr. Cree's first, and then pick up Miss Starr?"

"I will, Mr. Jenks," Dan answered with less friendliness. "I'll bring 'em. We certainly have changed things here since you turned up. When your father comes back, he'll think he's next door. He's getting well, I hope, Mr. Jenks?"

"Yes, Dan," Hiram said, smiling. "He is very much better—very much better indeed."

"That's good! Good-by, sir."

Shanahan's admiration for his young and active master had grown day by day. It began with the new twelve-cylinder motor car. It increased when a second chauffeur was engaged—whom Dan gleefully "educated"—for the small car. Indeed, Hiram's way of life, which was swift and golden, appealed to Dan's sense of impropriety. The wheels were going round.

It had also been a pleasure for him to discover that Hiram, ignorant of the newer, brighter places of the town, had within him the adventurous soul of an explorer. Together, in the little hours, they discovered many things. Wholly and heartily, he approved this forthgoing son of battle. He was, Dan told himself, a chip of the old block—even to old Hiram's temper flashing out unexpectedly now and then. A curious point of resemblance was the fact that each of the two Jenkses used both hands to shave with, being, as Dan told Timmins, ambidextrous.

Perhaps the one thing he did not approve was the generosity with which young Hiram—following, as usual, in the footsteps of old Hiram—gave himself to Madelon Starr. The high heels had put a curse on

them both. Probably it was in the blood. Dan didn't like it; and it was for this reason that a little of the easy friendliness went out of his voice when Hiram bade him pick up Madelon in the motor car. He didn't want them heels in his car!

Hiram went back to the library, which served also as his drawing-room, to wait for his guests. He was staring at his handsome head in a mirror when old J. B. entered stiffly, and growled a salutation.

"What's the matter, J. B.?"

"My damned doctor calls it rheumatoid arthritis."

"Jove, I'm sorry!" said Hiram, stealing a glance at the mirrored reflection of his own physical well-being.

"Don't be such a damned peacock!" remarked J. B. It seemed as if he couldn't get that objectionable word out of his speaking vocabulary. "I know you haven't got it now—but, thank Heaven, you did have it, and you had it bad."

Hiram laughed good-naturedly.

"You can't get used to me, J. B., but you will after a while."

"What have you been doing here? What's all this stuff?"

"I couldn't stand that musty old furniture," Hiram explained patiently. "It smelled of old age. And the chairs creaked—as if they had rheumatoid arthritis," he added pleasantly, after a short pause, which gave point to the impertinence.

J. B. refused to take him up. He merely snorted and continued to glare at the new furniture, the new pictures, screaming their defiant newness, the blue china vases, the rugs—

"What the deuce do you want with a piano?" he asked. "Oh, I see that thing underneath! You play it with your feet, I suppose?"

"I have friends who are musical," Hiram replied, poking at the keys with one finger.

"And you hang over it, eh? You're going it strong, Hiram, but it won't last."

"No?"

"No! That damned hankypanky can't last. You'll go to pieces all at once, one of these days, and, by Heaven, you'll be a sight to see! Like a mummy! Unwrap you, and you fall into dust—and a devilish bad smell. I'm expecting it. It can't last!"

"But while it does last, J. B."—Hiram drew himself up and faced the mirror—"look at those arms and legs!"

"Peacock!" exclaimed J. B. "Lunatic! Hankypanky!"

He let himself down carefully into one of the new chairs. What creaked was not the chair, but Mr. Macraw's old bones.

"What lunatic pictures!" he went on, after a grunt of pain. "More hankypanky! When you've thrown away all your money, don't come to me."

Hiram refused to lose his temper, in spite of his partner's nagging.

"There's a lot of it to go through, J. B. It will last my time. I'm not endowing hospitals or building libraries for the illiterate. My charity is no gadabout. It stops at home."

"More than you do, I hear!"

"When one is young," Hiram began, and broke off in a gust of laughter.

The laughter ended in a sudden whinny and a senile cough. When he recovered from the cough, there was a look of anxiety on his face. He inspected himself in the mirror as if he feared J. B.'s prophecy was beginning to come true—as if the face in the glass might suddenly have gone back to old age.

J. B. watched, and wagged his old head, chuckling with delight.

"You're all right so far, Hiram," he said; "but I dare say it's a warning. That hankypanky won't last very long. It'll wear off—you mark what I say!"

Hiram made no reply. He seemed ill at ease, as if J. B.'s prediction was weighing upon him. He started forward with an air of relief when he heard voices in the hall, and little notes of laughter.

Madelon and Ada Calamy came in, followed by Dr. Cree—an impressive Dr. Cree, portly, voluble, sonorous. After greeting Hiram Jenks, he bore down upon J. B. and got him by the hand.

"What a pleasure this is!" he exclaimed. He was so vehemently agreeable that in spite of himself the crusty old man began to soften. "What a pleasure!" the doctor repeated. He fingered J. B.'s old-fashioned watch chain, from which a bluish scarab dangled. "I've not seen this one, Mr. Macraw—beautiful!"

J. B. took the scarab away from the plump hand that was caressing it; but he was pleased, all the same. The fellow did have some sense. The old banker forced a smile on his face and greeted the women.

They stood for a moment, side by side, with smiling acceptance of the old man's

greeting; and yet they differed as twilight differs from young day. Miss Calamy wore an evening gown that might have been smoke-colored, or gray—twilight-colored—the color of her eyes. Standing there at Madelon's side, she seemed taller than she was, and statelier. Her handsome face was steady, quiet, without being serene. Indeed, J. B. seemed to see in it more than woman's due measure of sadness.

She bade him good evening with a little smile, fugitive and cold, and gave him her hand. It was a firm hand, capable and strong.

"You were Mr. Jenks's nurse, I remember," said J. B. "He seems to be grateful."

"I did what I could," Ada replied.

Mr. Macraw turned to Miss Starr, and his eyes widened. She had not dressed for simplicity. Her gown displayed the young and vital woman within it. A blue thing, pallid, satiny, shining, it was merely a frame for the glowing girl.

She slipped her gentle hand into his. On one finger, he noticed, the great star sapphire shone. There were jewels in her hair and around her throat—sapphires warm as her eyes. She was blithe and girlish, with perhaps a hint of timidity; but she gave the old banker one of her smiles, gay and full of candor. Her presence brought with it a glow of warmth; and J. B. acknowledged to himself that she had a kind of charm.

He knew that high heels and coppery hair count for a good deal in a world where men are not overcritical; but there really was something very attractive about Madelon Starr. He did not think that it was merely her air of youth. It was something else—something more inscrutable than her childishness.

Even at table, while his soup cooled, he found himself watching her—this woman who laughed like a girl. Where had his partner picked up these people, anyway? It was Hiram's way. Young or old or young again, that was his nature.

J. B. liked the other woman better, because she was easier to understand. Miss Calamy had been placed between him and Hiram Jenks, but she did not seem to have much to say to either of them. There was something almost pathetic in the way she watched the great Dr. Cree, hanging upon his words, absorbing herself in him. She seemed full of unfailing faith and devotion. More than that, she appeared to be wrapped up in him physically, as if she had become

part of his gleaming personality. With all that she was an ordinary woman, J. B. told himself—the kind of woman a man could talk to without being on his guard.

He had no chance to talk to her, however, for Dr. Cree's expansive egotism enveloped the table. The great man fed his eloquence with soup, and talked. He spoke of Hiram Jenks as "our young friend," and found a tag of Latin to praise him with—something that ended with *juvenis*.

Hiram threw back his head, crowned with short, thick brown hair, and laughed, showing his gold incisors. He laughed seemingly out of sheer good nature and happiness, as if to his plausible appearance of youth there had been added the real joy of living.

"Yes, the man who has youth," Dr. Cree explained pontifically, "has more than youth—he has happiness. They go together. They are"—he made a gesture—"they are one and the same. It is only when a man begins to get old that he finds he has lost something besides his youth, that happiness has departed—slipped away imperceptibly, as water sinks into the sand. Then, one day, he realizes that he is old—and unhappy."

His big dark eyes rested on the rheumatoid financier who sat opposite him; but J. B. did not look up from his plate.

Paul, the waiter, had left the room, and there was greater freedom at the table, but Hiram's low-voiced remarks to Madelon were lost in the flow of the doctor's oratory.

"It is a miracle that I hold in my hand," he was saying; "the miracle of youth. You would not believe me, Mr. Macraw, if I told you that I alone had discovered this secret of making the old young once more. No! Men of science have labored for years, coming closer to it, closer all the time, until the hour was ripe for me to step in and gather up in my hands the results of their labors—and perfect them. Voronoff thought he was working for humanity, but he was working for me! Blondlot, too—all of them. And then I came!"

He leaned across the table, forcing J. B.'s attention.

"I went beyond them. Take the X rays. What had science to tell you? That the action of the X-rays provokes a certain ionization, to use a technical term, and that the ultra-violet radiations exercise an analogous influence on—on what? On metals. Was I content?"

Dr. Cree glowed with self-approbation, pride, glory.

"Where are the X rays? Where do they have their home?"

They were all listening now. This warm, dominating voice held them.

"Where? In an unknown region, midway between the electric rays and the light rays—between the two, you understand. An unknown region—unknown to science. This region I have explored, and I have drawn from it the veritable rays of youth, cathodic, light-giving, heat-giving, youth-giving!"

The great scientist was authoritative, compelling. They listened with a sense of awe as the rich, profound voice boomed on and on. Perhaps they did not understand his imposing eloquence, with its strange words and its dark air of a new science, but they bent to it.

Old J. B. looked from the man of words to the man of the miracle—from the glowing scientist to his partner, flushed with happiness and with the pride of his miraculously recovered youth; and the rheumatism ached in his aged bones and envy burned in his soul. Why should that great gift have been given to old Hiram, with his futilities and smirking follies? Hiram had had his youth, while he—even when they were both young together—had known only hard work and the gray quiet of domesticity.

There came to him a vision of those days—he brooding in a corner of the drawing-room, while Hiram, radiating careless gaiety, leaned over the piano, where a woman sat, singing. And now a second youth, equally glorious, had been given to the fellow—to Hiram!

Why not to himself, to him who could make a sane use of it? Why not? And then, half aloud, J. B. muttered:

"Hankypanky!"

In spite of the menu, in spite of Paul's deft service, the festival dinner was not proving very successful. Dr. Cree's monologue was oppressive, save perhaps to Ada Calamy, who loved the mere sound of his voice, no matter what he might be saying.

Mr. Macraw was wrapped up in his own dark thoughts. He ate grudgingly, like a man who has a doubtful digestion. The few remarks he uttered did not make for cheerfulness.

At first Hiram had struggled youthfully to maintain the festival spirit. He had

drawn the doctor out and approved his eloquence; he had talked blithely to Miss Calamy; he had flattered old J. B., and taunted him, and tried to make the best of his misfit dinner party; but after a while—even before the dessert came—he seemed to give it up.

There was always Madelon to talk to and to look at. At first she had tried desperately hard to help Hiram out in his endeavor to make the dinner a success. Then she, too, seemed to lose courage. J. B., propped up at the table, angular and repelling as a tombstone, cast too heavy a shadow. Her smiles and her pretty ways were frozen by his chilly disapproval. Whether she wanted it or not, she was driven back on Hiram; and though their conversation was for every one to hear, there ran through it a tone of confidence, as if it was for themselves alone.

Perhaps only Miss Calamy noticed this, for she alone was watching them, while Dr. Cree boomed away and the tombstone cast its shadow. And perhaps only she saw, with woman's instinct of sympathy, that something new had come into the girl's face. It was not gaiety; that merely went and came on the surface. It was something higher and more beautiful—a new gentleness. It was on Madelon's lips, when she smiled. When she looked up at Hiram, it was in her eyes—this new and revealing gentleness.

Ada knew what it meant. She, too, had known the love that lifts a woman out of herself, once only, once in all the years. She knew!

In the alert and audacious face of Hiram, had she looked as attentively, she might have seen a reflection of the same unusual gentleness. Always it was there when he bent toward Madelon; and the curious thing was that the rejuvenated Hiram, with this love light upon him, did not look ridiculous. With his new youth he had acquired, as it were, youth's right to love without being absurd. He spoke to the girl in a half whisper, and his smile was a public avowal of tenderness.

"Now?" he asked.

Madelon nodded assent, and straightened up in her chair. She seemed a little frightened and defiant.

"I wanted you all to have a souvenir," Hiram began, raising his voice.

"What's that you're saying?" J. B. interposed sharply.

"I'm suggesting, J. B., that you should open that little box in front of you. It's yours—a souvenir. And Miss Calamy—and Dr. Cree—something by which to remember our dinner this evening. Hope you like them!"

"That's just like you, Hiram," said Mr. Macraw.

Dr. Cree and Ada, who had already opened their boxes, were praising the jeweled gifts. The old banker was slower in finding the catch and opening his box. At last he succeeded, and took out a dark blue scarab.

"Eh? I don't know, Hiram," he observed, holding it close to his eyes and turning it about. "Yes—it's good, Hiram! You do surprise me!"

"And please you, I hope, J. B."

"Yes, I am very much obliged. It's interesting. I am glad to have it. How did you ever have sense enough to buy it? I expect the doctor helped you."

He was chuckling away over the scarab, quite content, when Hiram said:

"And yours, Madelon—let me open the box."

"What you got for her?" J. B. asked, looking up suspiciously.

Hiram took out a ring with a diamond. It was a costly ring that told its own story. He held it to the light for a moment; then he lifted Madelon's hand and slipped it on her finger.

"Do you like it, dear?" he inquired gently.

"What's that mean, eh?" said old J. B., glaring at his partner.

"It's our engagement ring," Hiram answered quietly. "We are going to be married, Madelon and I. Give us your congratulations, J. B., and your blessing."

He leaned over and lightly kissed the girl's shining hair. Then he turned to face his partner.

"Blessing!" J. B. exclaimed. "Give you my blessing! You old—"

The words died on his lips. For once he was speechless. He could only glare—at Hiram Jenks, who faced him, unabashed, head up, and at Madelon, who looked him straight in the eyes, unflinching, defiant.

"My blessing!" he growled.

XI

MADELON woke late on the morning after the unsuccessful dinner at which her engagement to marry Hiram Jenks had been

announced; and she woke in a nervous mood. She had her tea and a cigarette in bed, but they did not help much. She heard Mrs. Dowsing speaking somewhere in the house, and the mere sound of that acrid, penetrating voice troubled her. So that old woman had come back! Madelon had not expected her to return for another week.

Mrs. Dowsing had not condescended to explain where she was going, or why. She had gone away, that was all, with her lank traveling bag and umbrella. She had gone, and now she had come again—her voice was heard once more in the house.

Madelon could not make out what the woman was saying. She was speaking to the maid, probably. Her voice gave Madelon a sense of inquietude, a sense of uneasiness, a sense of feebleness, as if a part of her strong young will was slipping away from her. The feeling remained with her when, impatiently, she flung herself out of bed, when she bathed, when she dressed.

"I might as well get it over," she told herself, for the sense of trouble—of something to be feared—was growing on her.

She had chosen a gray walking suit. Before leaving the room, she put on the smart, slangy little hat that went with the suit; somehow or other it gave her a kind of courage. She knocked sharply at the housekeeper's door and went in with an attempt at swagger.

"Home again, Mrs. Dowsing? How are you?"

Madelon stood in the middle of the room, her hands in her pockets—like a boy.

Mrs. Dowsing was sitting at the open window; it gave on the street, and admitted the hot and heavy autumnal air. She was a trifle weary-looking—a shadowy old woman, austere and repressed. She greeted Madelon with only a word or two, and then, as if she saw nothing likable in the young, almost boyish figure confronting her, she turned away and looked out into the street.

Although Mrs. Dowsing never had much to say for herself—although she always seemed to be a watcher in the house, rather than a member of the household—yet now her silence, with its hint of rude indifference, added to Madelon's sense of trouble.

"Where have you been, Mrs. Dowsing?"

"A journey."

"Well, the house got on all right in your absence."

"And you?"

"Me, too," said Madelon shortly. What disgusted her most was the woman's stillness. It was like a cold, hard surface, underneath which dangerous, impossible things might be moving. "I've been all right," she went on resolutely. "I was at a dinner last night. Ada was there, and Dr. Cree, and Mr. Jenks. I am going to marry Mr. Jenks."

She threw up her chin as she said it, and waited. Mrs. Dowsing turned toward her slowly, but did not look her in the face.

"Marry who?"

"I am going to marry Mr. Jenks," Madelon repeated, but the defiance went out of her voice, and she added weakly: "Some day."

"Hiram Jenks! That old man!" Mrs. Dowsing exclaimed.

This time she stared the girl full in the face. What she saw there was confusion—wild confusion. Madelon hesitated. What could she say to this peering old woman? How much did she know, this watcher in the house? There was only one thing to say, and Madelon finally said it in a matter-of-fact way.

"Oh, no, not that old man—his son."

"His son! That old man is married? He has a son?"

The girl laughed nervously.

"He certainly has a son, for I am going to marry him."

"You!"

"Why not?"

There was a moment's pause. Then Mrs. Dowsing stood up, tall, in spite of her bent frame, dominating, hard; and yet she spoke quietly enough.

"Because you will not be permitted to marry any one. Fool!" she added suddenly. "They would break you like a straw!"

The youth and color went out of the girl's face. Fear came into her eyes, and a shudder ran over her, but she held herself steady and answered sullenly:

"I shall do as I please."

"Madelon, you will do precisely what you are told to do—that and nothing else."

Mrs. Dowsing quietly resumed her seat by the window. Before this dead calm the girl felt her will power escaping from her. Her mind seemed to be no longer her own. Around her, like a mist, was a sense of fear—terror of this cold and rigid watcher in the house. Nevertheless, she swung on her heel and swaggered to the door.

"We'll see!" she shouted back from the hall.

This was nothing but bravado. Under Madelon's brave exterior was a little girl, frightened, shaken with terror and shame. She ran out into the street to escape from the house, from the watcher within, from herself.

As she went up Fifth Avenue, she was caught up in a crowd which swept her along. It was a crowd and it was a river—fed by little streams eddying in from the side streets—that flooded the avenue; dark humanity with tossing hands and sullen eyes, unified and menacing as water.

She shivered at the impact of this human storm. It beat upon her with sinister electric shocks that tortured her nerves, and she fought her way out of it into quieter streets. For a long time she walked on, rapidly, with aimless impatience, heeding no one, trying to wear down the flurry of her nerves, trying to get rid of the animal fermentation of that sinister crowd.

It was a vile day, she thought—a dark and agitated day, wrapped in hot, shadowy clouds, heavy with unloosed storms—an evil day. Where could she go? Always she would have to return to that house and the watcher, sitting there cold and austere and silent. Sooner or later she would have to return—or let herself drift and drown in the sullen tidal crowd of the avenue.

At last she turned and went wearily back to the house, which, after all, was less terrible than the streets. In any case the worst she would meet there was—herself. She opened the door with her key, tossed her hat down in the hall, and went into the drawing-room. She threw herself on the silk couch and lay there, motionless, staring at the ceiling, thinking, thinking.

She was not a piece of clay, to be handled and shaped into something round or square, and set up in a room. She was herself—something mysterious, undying, answerable only to herself, responsible for herself.

Oh, damn the men, and the other women, and all the hands that tried to hold her and pull her this way or that! Men and women always jabbering of love—"please do this, for love's sake!"—jabbering or coaxing or hitting her over the head, so that they could have their own way and prevent her from being herself!

This thing they called love! It wasn't her kind. It was not their kind of love she

had dreamed of through the years, since she was a little girl, when a tremor of stars and nerves had whispered of it to her in her bed. That was the only kind of love worth while.

She knew just what it was, too. It was not always asking for something, saying "please," or claiming and threatening. Her kind of love was the door to a new life. That was it! It meant renewal. It meant that all the past should be annulled. It meant escape from the past and from the present, with all their schemes and witnesses and accomplices!

With an outcry half savage and half sobbing, the girl leaped to her feet and began to pace the floor, as if to trample down her thoughts. In answer to her cry, harsh laughter, mocking and obscene, came from the window. It struck her like a blow. She pulled herself up in front of the parrot and stared at him—stared into his little eyes, which were incredibly old, sagacious with all the world's wickedness, inscrutable and vile as the unblinking black beads in the head of an idol.

"You devil!" she said at last.

The bird shrugged up his shoulders, one after the other, and laughed again, as if he was laughing at infamous, unspeakable things.

"Hello, hello!" he screeched out. "Hello, Hiram! Hello, Hiram!"

"Devil!" Madelon repeated with quiet conviction.

Suddenly she swung her hand and knocked the bird from his perch. As he fell, screaming and swearing, his leg chain clattering, she threw the black cloth over him. Then she stood listening to his muffled oaths.

She had not heard the knock at the door; she had not noticed the entrance of her little housemaid. At the girl's "Excuse me, Miss Starr," she glanced nervously over her shoulder.

"What's that bird been doing?" the little maid asked, round-eyed.

"Looking at me—like a man, damn him!" Madelon cried. "What do you want?"

"These have just come for you, Miss Starr," the maid answered primly, for she thanked God that she was better bred than her mistress.

She held out a sheaf of orchids, pallidly purple, leprous in spots.

"Put them anywhere."

"It was the chauffeur brought them, and he wants to know if you would care to use the car. He's waiting."

Madelon had not thought of going out again. Then of a sudden she knew that she was going out again, and that in going she was not merely obeying a personal impulse, but that her determination was due to forces outside of herself and unknown to herself. She was going somewhere in order that something might be accomplished, and because something had to be accomplished; for nothing but that.

"My hat's somewhere. Get me the gray coat."

She looked out of the window. Hiram's small car—the new one—was drawn up at the curb, Dan Shanahan lounging beside it. She rapped on the window pane and gave him one of her ever-ready smiles; and Shanahan took off his cap to her and threw away the cigarette he was smoking. Those were the only movements he made until Miss Starr, shrugging on a light gray coat, appeared at the door and came slowly down the steps; but during the few moments he stood there he had been watching an upper window.

What he saw was a face, half hidden by the curtain. It was a shadowy face, white and old, and the eyes in it were watchful. It was some one Shanahan had never seen before; and he didn't care if he never saw her again, he told himself.

"Where will you go, miss?" he asked, as he held the door for Madelon. "I have been put at your orders."

At first she did not know what answer to make. Then, quite unexpectedly, she heard herself saying:

"Go to Dr. Cree's." She gave him the address. "It's just off Madison Avenue," she added.

"Yes'm."

Shanahan slipped into his seat. As he turned the car toward the avenue, he glanced around at the little house they were leaving. The face in the upper window had vanished.

For a moment he was busy with the motor car. Then he looked back once more, and saw a lean, black-gowned figure standing in the area. Even as he looked, the woman ran up the steps to the street and hurried away toward Sixth Avenue—as one who goes on a mission.

(To be continued in the January number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

Night Air

THE STORY OF CERTAIN DEVIOUS TRANSACTIONS IN REAL ESTATE AND HORSEFLESH

By Frank Condon

ON an uncomfortable settee close to the hall door in the outer office of Martin Lutewiler, dealer in real estate, sat two men. They were strangers in town—the town being Indiola, which is a shining jewel upon the bosom of Imperial Valley. One of them chewed gum rapidly and with occasional smacking noises. He shifted his feet, wriggled and squirmed, and generally betrayed signs of increasing discontent.

His companion, a large, calm, pink and white man, leaned back placidly and gave his attention to a brown stain in the plaster ceiling. Neither of the strangers had removed his cap, though other hats, waiting for recognition, were held respectfully in hands.

At length the gum chewer rose and walked briskly over to the telephone Hebe, who sat behind a railing, engrossed in light literature.

"Sister," he said, "we crave action. Will you or will you not leap inside and tell your boss that two of San Francisco's native sons stand without the portal?"

The large gentleman on the settee removed his gaze from the ceiling, and fastened it incuriously upon his friend.

"I'm sorry," the girl replied. "Mr. Lutewiler is very busy. I don't like to interrupt him."

"But we have to catch a train."

"What train?"

"Any good train with wheels on it," the young man declared. "We just got into town, and we yearn to get out of town. Go ahead, now, like a nice lady. Tell the boss that Alf and me are out here, suffering from inattention."

"What did you say your name was?"

"What it was it still is. I'm William Haycroft Pye, of San Francisco, partly

white, unmarried, underweight, and vaccinated on the arm—in other words, I'm Bill Pye, at one time our leading jockey. The dumb gentleman on the bench is Mr. Alfred Hopper, sole owner and believer in Hopper's Asthma Balsam. He don't feel gabby, so I'm doing the discourse. We want to find out about some land. Is it all clear to you, before you walk in on your employer?"

The girl smiled, and shifted her gum without losing a stroke.

"If you'll wait a few minutes longer, I'm sure Mr. Lutewiler will see you. You and your friend are next, anyhow."

Mr. Pye was willing to continue the argument, but the telephone began to buzz, whereat he stalked sulkily back to his placid companion.

"Alf," he said, "are we going to wait or not?"

"Sure," returned Hopper. "Sit down and behave yourself."

There ensued another period of squirming on the part of young Mr. Pye. He glared steadily at the telephone girl, until that optimistic soul began to get her numbers wrong; but in due time the frosted glass door opened and the bulky form of Mr. Martin Lutewiler appeared.

He was, as befitted a man of his prominence, sleekly dressed, with a gorgeous silk necktie, the ends of which struggled out from beneath his beard. Mr. Lutewiler's beard was one of Indiola's salient features. Citizens spoke of it respectfully, as they did of the new Indiola city hall, which was built of pink bricks.

Mr. Lutewiler was a heavy, slow-moving man, broad of beam, his head fitting into his shoulder blades, as if he had no neck. His eyes were light blue, and he blinked them continually. There was a hard, un-

humorous air about him, some of which was natural, but most of which he had deliberately cultivated.

"Gangway!" said Bill briskly. "Hopper and Pye, from Frisco. Hold that door open, will you?"

Lutewiler looked astonished, turned a glance of reproach upon the telephone operator, and somewhat dubiously permitted the strangers to pass within.

"What did you wish to see me about?" he coldly inquired, closing the door behind him.

"About my property," returned Hopper, who had walked over to a large leather chair and was already seated. "There's some land in this neighborhood that belongs to me, and I want to know how much it's worth."

"His name is Alfred Hopper," volunteered Bill. "Hopper's Asthma Balsam. Retail price, twenty-five cents a bottle, but not much doing. Not enough asthma in this territory. His old lady's been paying you installments for nine years, and now she's dead."

"Oh!" said Mr. Lutewiler, his tone warming slightly. "You're that Hopper? I see. Have a couple of cigars?"

II

THE arrival of Hopper and Pye in the Imperial Valley metropolis was a casual aside. They had been in Tia Juana, Mexico, dabbling with horse races. Having spent two weeks and part of their joint account, they had started for San Francisco, when it occurred to Alfred that he had better look into this real estate matter. The ground had belonged to his mother, but she had gone on to a land even more delectable than Imperial.

Mr. Hopper was a man of thirty, and his regular business was the manufacture of a patent medicine, the formula for which he had purchased from an Indian. Hopper was a man of immense dreams. He believed firmly in almost everything, and his greatest faith was in Hopper's Asthma Balsam, a sickish-looking compound, green and sirupy, in fat bottles.

William Pye was in his twenties, a thin, nervous, pallid youth, who still suffered from the excesses in undereating through which he had staggered in the days of his jockeyhood.

Confronting Mr. Lutewiler, they looked at him appraisingly, while he described the

bit of land painfully paid for by old Mrs. Hopper at fifty cents a week. It was property of no great value, for, as the realtor pointed out, it lay beyond the town and in a spot without population.

"This parcel of yours, Mr. Hopper," Martin explained, "is practically paid for. There may be a small sum due in taxes and interest. It lies north of Indiola, toward the mountains, but it never will amount to anything."

"What's it worth?" Alfred inquired.

"That's a question. I suppose your mother paid, in all, three or four hundred dollars for the parcel. It might be worth that much to-day, and it might not. Here in town, of course, real estate values have climbed fast."

"Would you give five hundred for it?" Hopper asked.

"Might," Martin answered, with the caution that had made him famous. "I'd have to think about it."

"Where is this land?" inquired Mr. Pye. "Let's have a look at it."

"The very thing I was about to suggest. After I see these people in the office, I'll drive you out in my car."

Hopper and Pye again seated themselves upon the settee, and Mr. Lutewiler hurried through his business with the morning callers. Presently he appeared, with a linen duster on his arm, and announced that he was ready to leave.

During the short ride Mr. Lutewiler made himself agreeable—which was a rare thing for him to do. He learned something about his two callers. He heard from Alfred the sad story of Hopper's Asthma Balsam, and concluded that his visitors were men of moderate circumstances.

The touring car halted in a neighborhood of rocks, cactus, Joshua trees, and desert desolation. Mr. Lutewiler raised a puffy forefinger and aimed it across the gaunt land.

"There's your property, Mr. Hopper. Some day, when Indiola grows out here, it might be valuable; but just now it's plain desert."

"Well!" said Bill in disgust. "Your old lady is dead, and it's just as well she never lived to see what she bought."

"It doesn't look like what I expected," Alf remarked.

"It was a speculation on Mrs. Hopper's part," continued Mr. Lutewiler; "but it failed to develop."

"I'd be in favor of taking five hundred for it," Alfred announced, looking hard at Lutewiler. "You sort of mentioned that sum."

"I dunno about that," Martin said.

"One thousand," interrupted Mr. Pye, who had curled up gloomily on the rear seat.

"Oh, now!" chuckled the realtor. "A thousand is not to be thought of."

"I'm thinking of it," retorted little William. "Alf and me are partners. You can't split five hundred without getting into fractions, but you can split a thousand pretty."

Mr. Lutewiler pawed at his flowing beard, and beamed upon little Bill as he might have beamed upon a mischievous child.

"Five hundred would be more than liberal, young man," he said amiably. "I don't know if I'd care to give that."

"One thousand is the correct sum," Bill repeated. "Alfred is not a business man. He'd take anything you offer him, having a soft spot running from ear to ear. I'm the solid business man of this team. If we don't get a thousand smackers for this elegant home site, we picks up our marbles and we quits."

"How about that, Mr. Hopper?" Martin inquired, a colder tone creeping into his voice. "Does Mr. Pye make your decisions for you?"

"Sometimes," Alfred admitted. "Bill's sort of sharp about things."

"Then you refuse to accept five hundred for this barren acre of rocks, which, as your eye tells you, cannot be worth even that sum?"

Alfred wavered visibly, glancing across the unfriendly earth. On the rear cushions, Mr. Pye drew calmly at a slow-burning Indiola perfecto and assumed a manner of complete indifference.

"Bill," began the balsam king, "maybe five hundred—"

"One thousand pesos," said Pye, firmly and loudly. "This kindly old soul with the chin protectors is no fool. He offered five hundred. It's worth more, or he wouldn't have offered five hundred. Is that sense or a bedtime story?"

Mr. Lutewiler glowered darkly, and, without another word, turned his automobile in the dusty highroad and wended his way back to Indiola in belligerent silence. When the machine drew up before the

splendid red Lutewiler Building, the proposed transaction in real estate was apparently as dead as the prehistoric dynasties of Babylonia.

Little William observed Martin with a sharp eye, as he opened the auto door and stepped down. Alfred emerged somewhat sulkily.

"Glad to have met you, Mr. Lutewiler," said Bill cheerfully. "We had a nice ride in your smooth-running car. Some day, when we're in town again, we'll drop in on you."

He advanced to shake hands, his manner cordial.

"Better come on upstairs," growled Mr. Lutewiler. "I'll give you a thousand."

III

HAVING completed the business in hand, Mr. Lutewiler invited his visitors to lunch, and escorted them with due formality to the Merchants' Grill, which is the *bon ton* restaurant of Indiola. The realtor seemed to harbor no resentment toward the diminutive Pye, but he emphatically assured Alfred Hopper that in selling his barren acre for one thousand dollars in cash he had driven a rare bargain.

"That's Bill's doing," Alf answered, with a grin. "Bill's a keen little runt. He don't look like much to the eye, but that skull of his is full of sense. Used to be a jockey, too."

"You don't tell me!" said Martin.

"Rode at ninety pounds," Bill admitted, "for five years. I suppose you never heard tell of Bill Pye?"

"No," said Martin. "Down here in Imperial we're a little out of it. Have our own modest doings, nevertheless. The Valley Fair is our big annual blow-out. Best county fair in the State of California. We have horse racing, too, in a small way; but I suppose you'll be leaving town before the fair begins?"

"Unless it begins before sundown," returned William, "you're correct. You have a nice town here, but we're Frisco folks, and there's only one Frisco."

"A very nice town," concurred Mr. Hopper. "I'd like to linger, but my business is suffering."

He referred to the asthma cure, which, of course, was not only suffering, but was close to dissolution.

After a pleasant lunch, the three business men returned to the Lutewiler Build-

ing, where Mr. Hopper signed a final document and received the cash.

During this formality, Mr. Pye remained in the outer office, there being no immediate call upon his talents for trade and barter. He blarneyed the telephone girl, tried the patent catch on the window, looked at such *Indiola* specimens as were there in evidence, and finally observed a rather disconcerting phenomenon in a far corner of the room, under the framed chromolithograph of "Custer's Last Stand." A young and attractive person, wearing brown pumps, sat in the shadows and was endeavoring to conceal the fact that she was weeping.

Bill decided, after a first hasty inspection, that a lady was having a quiet attack of hiccups, but a prolonged stare convinced him that sorrow had indeed entered the room. Her hat was large, lacy, and flopped down in front. On it were red and white roses, which hung in such a way as to conceal the wearer's face.

Mr. Pye began to saunter, with a strained attempt at casual strolling. Certainly the lady was crying. She seemed about twenty years old, and, as William saw quite distinctly, she had lovely blue eyes and a tilted nose—not the too tilted type that leans toward comedy, but with just a faint suggestion of pertness. An abashed tear trickled down her cheek, but she stopped it with the smallest handkerchief south of Tehachapi. The one thing that gave William Pye cold shivers was the sight of a winsome young female silently sobbing her heart away.

Alfred Hopper reappeared presently, having in his pocket a thousand dollars in Lutewiler money, and wearing a manner of lofty triumph.

The weeping village maiden hastily dried her eyes, rose at a summons, and was admitted to the whiskered presence. Mr. Pye stood on one foot, staring at the door with the frosted glass.

"Come on, Bill," said Alfred. "We're finished here—and we've done a good day's work, too!"

"Yeh," replied Bill absently.

They went downstairs together. On the walk William halted.

"You didn't notice that girl, did you?" he asked.

"What girl?"

"She went in as you came out."

"What about her?"

"Nothing, except she was crying. It sure gets me to see a woman cry."

Alfred looked at his companion in mild reproach.

"Bill," he said, "women are always crying about one thing or another. Usually it don't mean anything."

Mr. Pye leaned gently against the brick wall of the Lutewiler Building and scratched his chin. Alfred contemplated him with growing uneasiness.

"We ought to be getting back to the hotel," he urged. "There's a train north this afternoon."

"You go ahead," replied the little man. "I'll hang around here awhile."

IV

WHEN the girl came down the stair, she was still moist of eye, but at sight of the little man she dabbed hastily at her averted face and started to hurry. Bill removed his Frisco fog cap with a sweeping gesture.

"Pardon me, miss," he said in his politest manner; "but we can't let this go any further."

The girl stopped and glanced, rather startled, from beneath the rim of the floppy headgear.

"It's none of my business," William continued; "but I saw you upstairs. If somebody's been hurting your feelings, where can he be reached?"

The startled look on the girl's face gave way to a smile.

"You can reach him by walking up the stairs," she said. "If you weren't so little, I'd be glad to have you go up and thrash him good!"

"Old man Lutewiler?" exclaimed Bill. "What's he been doing to you?"

"What a curious person you are!" she said, smiling again.

"Not me!" said Bill warmly. "I'm a stranger in town, and I can't stand to see a lady cry. That's the one thing I can't stand."

"What were you doing up there?" she asked.

"Selling Lutewiler some uncut rocks," he grinned. "Still I don't know what he did to make you cry."

"That's a long story—too long."

"No," he said, "not if we sit down somewhere."

They were now walking side by side. When the Merchants' Grill confronted them, William paused.

"If you'll have a cup of coffee with me," Bill pleaded, "I'll be much obliged. Besides which, I might be of some use to you. You never can tell."

"I need a cup of coffee," she said.

Bill opened the door for her. When they were comfortably seated at a window table within the restaurant, facts began to marshal themselves. Her name was Edna Morgan, and she lived with her mother in Indiola, having come into town lately from a near-by ranch. Her father had died several months before, leaving little but trouble. The ranch had been taken for debt. Mother and daughter now shared rooms in an Indiola boarding house, where they were unhappy.

"So Mr. Lutewiler's got your farm away from you," said William. "What a nice old guy he is!"

"That isn't the worst of it," Edna said. "I've been teaching school since we came into town, and now I've lost that. Lutewiler is chairman of the board, but he refuses to do anything for me."

"Fired?"

Edna nodded.

"Another girl wanted the place, and she has it. Her people are friendly with the Lutewilers, and he's the big man in Indiola. He's our wealthiest citizen, and he will be richer still. That's why it was so wicked of him to take our farm away, after all the hard work father put in on it."

"Go ahead," William urged. "How'd he come to take it away?"

"Well, you see, father owed Martin Lutewiler money, but it couldn't have been a very large sum. We had a few horses, too, because father was interested in racing, the same as Martin, though not on such a large scale. It was those racing debts that ruined us. Martin Lutewiler took the few horses we had—the good ones—and left us nothing but poor old Comrade. If we could have saved the ranch from the wreck, mother and I might have made a lot of money."

"Strawberries?" queried Bill. "Great country for strawberries."

"No," she said. "Oil."

"Oil! I didn't know this was oil country. Where's your derricks?"

"It has just been discovered. Nobody could know that our little ranch was in the middle of the oil belt. It was all done quietly, and Martin Lutewiler was hand in glove with the companies that have bought

control of the land. Now he's got our place. It does seem miserably unjust!"

Mr. Pye had been gravely holding his coffee cup in the air during this recital, apparently about to drink from it. He now replaced it on the table.

"Say," he asked, "whereabouts is your farm?"

"North of town, about four miles."

"Do you go past a red farmhouse with a white windmill in the front yard?"

His companion nodded, wondering what Mr. Pye's drift might be.

"Is it out along the road where the railroad crosses, and where there's a shanty with all the windows busted?"

"A mile beyond that."

Mr. Pye turned slowly and looked out upon the sunny main street of Indiola.

"Suffering catfish!" he said solemnly. "Suffering and utterly agonized catfish!"

"What's the matter?" Edna asked, alarmed.

"Why," explained William, "we just sold our lot to Lutewiler—out by your farm. We sold it for a thousand dollars, thinking it was what it looked to be, which was rocks, cactus, and sand. At that he only wanted to pay us five hundred dollars."

The girl was indignant.

"He's a dishonest old man. He only gave you a thousand dollars? How much land was it?"

"One acre," mourned Bill. "I boosted him from five hundred to a thousand, and we both thought I was a smart young fellow. I'll bet that acre is worth nine million dollars, and if there's any oil around, you'll find all of it just underneath where we sold out!"

"There's no telling," Edna admitted; "but you should not have sold. That was a terrible mistake!"

"I knew Lutewiler was a slicker," said Bill gloomily. "I could tell by his whiskers. Any man who parts his whiskers has something wrong with him."

The new friends, brought closer by mutual griefs, discussed things for an hour or more. When they departed from the Merchants' Grill, William gallantly escorted Edna to her boarding house and reluctantly left her at the gate.

"I would like to call on you again," said Bill, in parting. "Things are never so bad but what they can get worse. This smart old gentleman has made your family and

my family look dumb and helpless, but nothing is over till they hang up the official result. We may leave town to-day, and I'd like to see you again before I go."

"Come this afternoon," said Edna, her spirits rising. "I'll be glad to see you—and bring your friend."

"If I do, I'll have to carry him on a shutter," William grinned. "Alfred never had a strong heart, and it's going to be weaker than ever when he hears the latest oil news!"

They parted, each regarding the other as a rather nice person.

V

MR. HOPPER was carefully shaving the second chin from the end when Bill Pye walked in upon him. While ascending the stairs, Bill could hear the jolly tones of Alf's voice, as he plied the glistening steel. He was singing a rowdy water front ballad of yesteryear, and a fine humor was upon him. There was money in his pocket, and the future seemed attractive. He thought of the balsam, and what a little snappy advertising might do with it.

"You're going to sing out of the other side of your jaw in a minute!" Bill snorted, as he entered, shutting the door behind him, and shaking the Hotel Indiola from stem to stern. "This Martin Lutewiler has just given us a close haircut, including all of the scalp and part of the spinal column. I thought we were a couple of smart dealers putting something over on an Imperial Valley yap, but I know different now. We're nothing but a couple of cross-eyed morons, and somebody better take the matches away from us."

Alfred patted some powder into a cleft in his chin, and regarded his comrade with polite inquiry.

"Referring to what?" he asked.

"Referring to your acre out in the desert," snapped Bill. "Better put a red circle around to-day on the calendar, Alf, because it's the only day you'll ever lose a million dollars."

Mr. Pye flung himself upon the bed and related the dismal facts. Alfred listened in pained amazement.

"I can see, now, where you were in too big a hurry," he said coldly.

"I was?" William roared. "I had to hold you to keep you from giving him the land. You'd have taken an old shirt, if it wasn't for me!"

"Well, it's too late now," Mr. Hopper said resignedly. "I don't suppose we could get out a habeas corpus or something?"

"The only legal thing we could do is go and shoot the old skunk," remarked Bill. "There must be a law giving people permission to shoot gophers and Lutewilers. Say, Edna Morgan wants me to bring you around to her house this afternoon."

"Is she pretty?"

"She is, but that means nothing to you. I saw her first. Besides that, fat people like you should shun romance, because it curdles them."

"I told you to come away from that weeping female," Alfred said mournfully. "We'd be on our way now, only for her, and we'd never have heard of this oil."

"Keep on shaving. You shave better than you talk. We'll have something to eat, and then we'll go calling in pursuit of pleasure and information."

It was mid afternoon when Hopper and Pye strolled up the steps of the modest boarding house and inquired for Mrs. Morgan and her daughter. Mrs. Morgan shook hands with the callers, and took up the subject of Martin Lutewiler in a broad, general way.

The two visitors were regaled with the story of Edna's father—a good man in his day, but a reckless spender, with a touch of the gambler. He had experimented with running horses, and had ventured to compete with the arrogant Lutewiler. At the time of Morgan's death, there remained to him several horses, some good and some bad. Lutewiler took the good ones. He left, for the widow and daughter, a sick horse called Comrade, which had developed a cough.

When the talk centered upon horses and racing, little William Pye brightened.

"This Lutewiler's a racing nut, you say?" he inquired.

"He is very proud of his stable. He wins almost everything, and his Saxby is the unquestioned champion of Imperial Valley. They used to believe that Comrade would be a champion, too; but he began to cough, and that ended him."

"Cough, does he?" queried Mr. Hopper, with sudden interest. To Alfred, the word immediately brought up the subject of balsam. "What's he got—asthma?"

"We don't know," answered Mrs. Morgan; "but three years ago Comrade almost won the Valley Handicap."

"You see, Mr. Pye," Edna explained, observing Bill's deep interest, "the Valley Handicap is the most interesting race of the fair week. It is usually run on the first Monday night."

"Monday what?" asked William.

"Monday night, about nine o'clock."

"You mean to sit there and tell me they have horse races at night?"

"Only during the fair week. It's a great novelty, introduced by Mr. Lutewiler himself. The grounds are always crowded, and it starts the fair off well. It's really pretty, with all the electric lights. This year they're going to have a big searchlight from one of the battleships and light the whole track with it. You'd find the fair very interesting, if you could stay."

"We might fix things up to stay," murmured Bill, spilling his tea. "I'd like to ask you something. Where is this broken down race horse of yours, and how near dead is he?"

"Oh, he isn't near dead at all," she explained. "He's all right, except for his cough. He can't race any more, so he has no value; but he's just fine to drive in a buggy. He's so gentle, and I'm very fond of him."

"How about having a peek at him?" Bill persisted. "I used to be a jockey, and what I don't know about horses you can write on a flea's finger nail."

"Of course you can see him. He's over in the livery stable. But why? He isn't anything to look at."

"No," said Bill dreamily, "but I just had one of those fleeting thoughts which ramble through the mind, looking for a home. There might be one more race left in your old skate. Did you ever think that my friend Alf Hopper can take a flagon of his famous Asthma Balsam, and, stepping out into the open air, cure any goshwhistled case of asthma in existence—man, female, horse, mule, mountain goat, or leaping jeebjeeb?"

Edna Morgan laughed a merry and musical laugh. Mr. Hopper slapped his hands together with a gesture of warm and kindling enthusiasm.

"If it's the asthma this horse has," he said, "Hopper's Asthma Balsam will cure him. My balsam—"

"We know," interrupted little Bill. "It's a good idea. Suppose we took this old windjammer and run him a race against the pride of the Imperial Valley? That

would be good! The sick against the well—the dead against the living—Morgan against Lutewiler. What's the matter with that?"

"You are so funny, Mr. Pye!" said Edna, giggling.

"I mean it," said William.

"We have no money to hire a trainer. Besides, who would ride Comrade, supposing he was well enough to race?"

"I'll ride him," answered Bill.

The young lady continued to chuckle.

"I'm still pretty light on a hay scale," said Bill warmly. "I'm an old gentleman now, but my head is young; and if you think there are better jockeys than me hanging round Indiola, you're on the wrong foot."

"All of which is wasted conversation," put in Mr. Hopper. "This here is a sick horse, with the whoops. Why talk about racing?"

"I didn't say there's a horse race in sight," snapped Bill. "All I ask is a look at this Comrade. When I see how sick he is, I'll durn soon say whether there's anything left of him to ride. When does their fair begin?"

They told him again.

"And they race at night, with a big electric light, and a lot of little ones. How interesting!"

An immediate inspection of Comrade at the Imperial Valley Livery Stables brought about certain conclusions. Alfred Hopper placed his experienced ear against Comrade's silky throat and listened to the wheezes. Bill Pye walked around and around the animal, feeling the bumps on his legs and poking him in the ribs.

"A bad case of asthma," Alfred announced; "but I can cure it."

"Sure," agreed Bill Pye.

VI

IN the days that followed, little Bill came to the conclusion that Edna Morgan needed a better protector than her mother ever could be, and made up his mind to offer himself for the job. He also learned about the insurance money that came eventually to the Morgans, as a result of the old gentleman's passing.

"How much do you get?" Bill asked, when Edna mentioned the subject.

"Three thousand dollars. It isn't much, but it will help us until I can get a good position."

"You're not going to need a position," William remarked.

When Edna demanded an explanation of this cryptic statement, the little man grew bashful and retired into himself.

Later on, when Comrade's cough responded to Alf's faithful and vigorous treatment, Bill hung a saddle upon the old speeder and took him around the track, to see how his legs worked, if at all. The result was somewhat vague, but little Bill seemed undismayed. He assured Miss Morgan that Comrade was still a long way this side of the glue factory.

"That ain't a bad horse at all," Bill cheerfully told Edna. "Of course, he's a little rusty, not having done any running; but his wind is pretty good, considering everything."

Toward the end of their first week in Indiola, Pye and Hopper once again mounted the stairs and sat down upon the wooden settee. This time the telephone girl knew them and hurried their admittance to the royal presence.

"I thought you two gentlemen had left town," Martin Lutewiler said, with a vague uneasiness in his voice.

"No," said William politely, "we sort of decided to stay and see your famous Valley Fair. You know you spoke about it. We've seen a heap of fascinating things in our lives, but we never beheld a horse race at night."

"My idea," Martin explained proudly. "Did you notice that big searchlight on top of the grand stand?"

Mr. Hopper admitted that he had noticed it.

"That's my idea, too. Ordinary electric lamps don't throw enough light, and we're going to have some bang-up races this year."

"We came to see you about that very thing," announced little William. "We have in mind a swell two-horse race, which ought to be the talk of the fair."

"What two horses?" Martin asked in surprise.

"Yours and Mrs. Morgan's."

"Comrade?" roared Lutewiler. "Don't make me laugh!"

"Wait a minute," explained William seriously. "Comrade was no good in the past, because his wind was gone, and he suffered from the asthma. My friend Hopper has been working on him, and now he's got plenty of wind, but no asthma. I don't

suppose you ever heard of Hopper's Asthma Balsam?"

Mr. Lutewiler made scornful noises in his throat.

"Are you two men really talking about a race between Saxby and Comrade?" he demanded.

"That's it," answered Bill. "Comrade is now a real race horse, having had expert attention."

"That would be no race," sneered Martin. "I could tie one of Saxby's legs in a sling, and beat that old Morgan ruin on three legs."

"You could once," responded the persistent Pye; "but you can't now. If you think you can beat this Morgan wreckage with a three-legged horse, you can win a lot of bets from us."

Martin stared. His hard blue eyes roved from William to Alfred.

"Oh, ho!" he said. "You boys want to do a little gambling, hey? Were you thinking of wagering more than six dollars?"

"I've been looking this Morgan horse over," explained Mr. Pye. "I'll admit he's a trifle rusty, but he's certainly worth a bet—with me riding. His cough is gone, thanks to Hopper's Balsam."

"How much do you want to bet, if I agree to such a race?"

"Answering that with another one, what odds will you give us?"

Lutewiler granted his disdain.

"Two to one—no, three to one."

"At that price," replied Mr. Pye, figuring rapidly on a piece of paper, "we can take about twenty thousand dollars of your money."

"Don't you bet with anybody else," requested the town boss. "I'll take all your bets myself."

"You'll get all of it," answered Bill, as he and Mr. Hopper arose.

At the door, Alfred paused for a final word.

"There's just one thing we have to insist on," he said, beaming upon Lutewiler. "This two-horse race has got to be run at night."

"At night?" exclaimed Martin.

"Sure," said Bill. "You have night races, don't you? Comrade's lungs are healed up, thanks to Hopper's Balsam, but the two things he can't stand in his present shape are dust and sunshine. To run right, he needs the cool, moist air of nighttime."

It gives us a little better chance, and we need all the chance we can get."

"Makes no difference to me," grunted Lutewiler; "and it might draw a good crowd."

VII

THUS it was decided to run, on the first Monday night of the Valley Fair at Indiola, California, a race between Comrade—who, his sponsors claimed, was newly cured of his cough—and Saxby, the best horse in the Lutewiler stables. The *Indiola Gazette* heralded the news, and added that if Gus Morgan could know of the race, he would turn over in his coffin and begin unscrewing the lid.

During the week preceding the fair, William Pye faithfully trotted Comrade around the track, and his pace improved. Little Bill climbed to the roof of the grand stand and investigated the huge searchlight. He found the arc lamp in charge of Harvey Fowler, proprietor of the Indiola Electric Shop. He learned that it had come from a battleship, and had probably chased many a submarine in other days.

Harvey and Bill struck up a friendly acquaintance, and Mr. Fowler explained that ordinary electric bulbs were too feeble. Spectators couldn't see the races distinctly, so Martin Lutewiler had invested in the big light.

"But he'll get the money back," said Harvey. "He always does."

On the Saturday before the fateful Monday, Mr. Pye escorted Miss Morgan into a drug store and bought her an ice cream soda. They sat for some time in a little booth, discussing the importance of the coming event.

"You go and get that three thousand dollars," William said. "I want to bet it on Comrade."

"William," said the girl, "wouldn't that be foolish?"

"No," said Bill earnestly. "It's a cinch."

Monday morning arrived, and with it a final meeting in the office of Martin Lutewiler, which was attended by Mayor Ike Boyd of Indiola. Ike had agreed to be the stakeholder. By summoning together all their resources, Alfred Hopper and William Pye had scraped up the sum of four thousand dollars in cash. Besides that, Bill carried Edna Morgan's three thousand in his pocket.

The conference was brief. Martin agreed to give them odds of three to one, betting twenty-one thousand dollars against seven thousand that Saxby, his horse, would that very night defeat Comrade in a contest of speed. Mayor Boyd took the money, marked down the terms of the wager on a bit of paper, and put the cash in a large manila envelope.

"This," said Mr. Lutewiler, grinning at the little group in his office, "is the easiest money I ever made!"

"No," answered little Bill. "You made money easier than that the day you bought Alf's acre."

With which significant statement Alf and Bill departed, warning Mayor Boyd not to try to leave town during his incumbency as stakeholder.

VIII

THE people of Indiola still discuss the famous race between Lutewiler's Saxby and Morgan's Comrade. The Valley Fair was attended by a large crowd of farmers and their families. Afternoon wore on, supper time came, dusk approached, and finally the evening throngs began gathering in the grand stand to witness the much discussed event.

When Saxby was led out upon the track, with a colored lad perched upon his back, the crowds yelled. Then came Comrade, with little Bill Pye riding, and the crowd cheered him as lustily as it had cheered Saxby.

During the preliminaries, Saxby danced about the track in the flickering lights, but Comrade was motionless. Little Bill sat like a statue upon his back, not particularly interested in the proceedings, and certainly not uneasy.

The horses moved up to the barrier, with Saxby doing a minuet, and observers remarked that the Lutewiler pride was nervous. There was a long wait, owing to the inability of the starter to coax Saxby into position. Comrade made no trouble at all. He merely walked up to the barrier net and rested his nose quietly against it.

Just as the barrier went up, the Indiola Silver Cornet Band crashed into what it regarded as music. The crowd yelled. Edna Morgan squealed with excitement. Mr. Hopper climbed upon his chair. The two horses plunged off into the dim zone of light beyond the grand stand, and the race was on.

In the glare of the huge searchlight, which was now thrown upon the track by Harvey Fowler, it was seen, as the horses rounded the first turn, that Saxby was out in front, leading by several lengths. Mr. Lutewiler leaned over the edge of the judge's stand and grinned widely. There was a muffled roar through the stands, because, in spite of the difference in the horses, their health, and their records, there had been a bit of wagering in Indiola among the red-eared proletariat. Many a dollar was down upon Comrade, generally at the odds of four to one. These bettors were now beginning to mourn, with the race only begun.

As the two animals sped into the night, it was easy to follow them in the glare of Harvey Fowler's battleship arc light. It was seen that Saxby steadily drew away from Comrade. The track was lighted by ordinary electric bulbs, but these cast only a feeble brilliance.

Presently Harvey's searchlight began to sputter. It died slowly out, and the race was all but blotted from sight. Harvey seemed to be having trouble with his flasher. The crowd, though it could see but indistinctly, still knew that Saxby was far in the lead.

In the faint light cast by the filament bulbs, which outlined the two animals but did not reveal them, the racers pounded on and reached the three-quarters post. Saxby rounded the turn and entered the stretch for the run home. He was without competition, and the odds should have been forty to one, instead of three. Somewhere in the rear, Comrade came on with his wind beginning to bother him and his rusty legs faltering.

As Saxby entered the turn and headed for the stands and the finish line, where Martin Lutewiler was joyfully waiting, Harvey Fowler, on the roof of the grand stand, mended his troublesome carbons, and the searchlight suddenly flared. Its great beam shot out into the night and down the track to greet the runners. Saxby, being in the lead, and alone, crashed squarely into the broad, blinding shaft of light, and then ensued a most astounding and unlooked-for thing.

The Lutewiler champion suddenly staggered. His front legs stiffened, and he slid forward in the soft dirt. Recovering, he came to a dead stop, raised his forelegs in the air, and jumped backward so violently

that his jockey threw both arms about the horse's neck and held on.

Martin Lutewiler's horse had apparently gone out of his mind. He shook his head and struck out with his forelegs, like a circus animal. Do what he could, his jockey was unable to bring those forelegs to the ground. Fighting grimly to hang on, the black boy slipped off his horse and landed on the earth, still clinging to the lines.

Unmindful of these gymnastics, Comrade pounded grimly around the track, making up time. He came into the stretch and passed the hysterical Saxby, William still sitting quietly in the saddle. Mr. Pye gave the plunging Saxby a wide berth, observing that Martin's horse was making desperate efforts to climb over the fence and drag his jockey with him.

Comrade bettors began a frenzied cheer, and the stand roared. The Lutewiler jockey was running around and around his mount, attempting to calm him. Comrade was not moving as fast as a meteor, and there was a rumbling in the old throat. He was slowing up visibly, toward the finish; but the important thing was that he was finishing alone and unchallenged. He went under the wire amid a burst of applause and cheering, with Saxby nowhere in sight.

Mr. Pye finished his horse race and then rode solemnly back to the starting line. He waved his scarlet cap toward Edna's box. The crowd surged upon the track, noisily congratulating him, and slapping Comrade upon the neck.

Alfred Hopper was already busy with financial matters. He had crossed the track a moment after the finish, and was deep in words with Mayor Ike Boyd.

Little Bill Pye hurried off the track, changed his garments, and joined Alfred and the Morgans. An hour later, there was mild jubilation in the sitting room of the boarding house. A division of the spoils followed, and a pile of bills lay upon the table.

"This," said Edna solemnly, "is the most wonderful moment in my life!"

"It proves what I always said," remarked Hopper thoughtfully. "I've got the greatest asthma cure in the world. We take a sick horse, mind you, and we win a race against a champion."

He looked at William, who said nothing, but continued to count money.

A pleasant evening was passed by all. Later on Edna walked out to the gate with

William, and they paused there, while Alfred sauntered down the street. It was the usual conversation of youth triumphant.

At the hotel, one hour later, Alfred was boasting of his asthma specific. William sleepily protested, without result.

"You dry up, will you?" he said impatiently, twisting beneath the covers and glaring at Alf. "You'd think your asthma cure won the race, to hear you talk!"

"It did win, didn't it?" Hopper indignantly snorted.

"It did not," yawned William. "I won that race."

"You rode a nice race," admitted the large gentleman. "You certainly held Comrade back where he belonged."

"Held him back!" chuckled Bill. "That's good. The poor old boneyard! He held himself back. He's probably the doggonedest slowest race horse in the living world."

"Huh!" said Alfred in disdain. "Then how'd we win?"

"We won because I'm a night worker. For the past week I've been making social calls on this Saxby horse in his stable, carrying with me a neat but powerful hand lamp."

Alfred looked interested.

"You thought," continued Bill, "that I was depending on your asthma cure. What

I actually won that race with was a forty-cent flash lamp. What do you suppose made that Saxby horse stand on his hind legs and climb the fence?"

"I dunno," said Alf in wonderment.

"No, but I do," chortled William. "Every night for a week, I've been popping up over the head of his stall with my little hand flasher, hitting the champion in the eye. I got him trained in a week so's he'd jump clean out of his halter. Took a lot of careful work, I can tell you, but it was worth it. You see, that horse sort of knew what to do when Harvey Fowler turned that beam into his eye as he came around the turn!"

William yawned again and slipped farther under the covers. Mr. Hopper began to understand that it was not all balsam.

"So Harvey Fowler, I suppose—" he began inquiringly.

"Yeh," answered Bill sleepily. "I had a talk with Harvey. Nice boy! He don't like Lutewiler, and we understood each other. Remember one thing—you and I are not yet even for the skinning that old man gave us."

Mr. Hopper turned off the light in amazed silence.

"Another thing," murmured William. "I'm going to marry that girl. So it turned out pretty good after all!"

MOMENTS OF SILENCE

Oh, heart in the breast of me,

Throbbing exultantly,

What do you say to the mind

When the sun sifts down through a tree

And its leaves are shaken with wind?

Are you saddened with sweet unrest?

Are you gladdened with ecstasy?

When the sun sinks down in the west,

And the sky is alive with flame

That leaps across to the east,

Like the sigh that escapes when lovers have kissed—

Can you give that a name?

When the brook sings down on its way

To the sea over mossy stones,

A naiad at play—

Can you put the song into words,

Translate it into the tones

Of the twilight music of birds?

F. L. Montgomery

MacDeal's Girl

A TALE OF LIFE AND LOVE IN A LAND OF GRAY SKIES AND
DOUR MEN

By Morgan Burke

DOWN under the dragged feet of the Western Hemisphere, as if kicked scornfully into the sea by the toe of South America, lies a dour land of gray skies and sullen waters, the Falkland Islands. Known little to the rest of the world except as the scene of a great naval battle during the war, the Falklands have yet been a greater battleground whereon man has contended with nature in a soul conflict for some seven generations of hardy Scots.

Incessantly storm-swept, between times wrapped in the drab folds of misty gloom, with a sun so rare that when it does slip out to shine timidly on its few days of splendor during the year it only irritates the grim, gray settlers, so accustomed to the monotonous tradition of eternal haze.

Gray, sea-beaten cliffs, high, rolling downs clad in thick gray-green grass. Over all a dull, chill humidity of foreordained grimness. The landscape holds it. It dims the vision and rusts the hearts of those who live there, with a well defined, desperate, age-old determination to live long and die hard.

MacDeal was like that. A pious man, true to his traditions—four generations of him hammered out of the brass of soul-starved privation by the will of God. His knees were calloused with prayer, as were his hands with toil. He was prosperous, as prosperity in the Falklands is reckoned. He had a good station some two and a half miles from the village of Port Stanley, plenty of sheep, a comfortable house, a dozen good horses, Falkland bred, an obedient wife, and—a daughter. MacDeal's Girl they called her, the length and breadth of the island.

Just how MacDeal's Girl happened to be born to the dour MacDeal and his unlovely

wife in that land of gloom and hopeless skies, no one could possibly explain. Out of the chill of them she sprang a living flame. Her long, strong body was slender and rounded. She was swift-moving, light-footed, free as a gull that sails the surf, free as the rush of the storm wind—yet never free, always held in reserve, tight held in leash by MacDeal, who prayed nightly, with his knees to the floor, that the devil in her might be slain.

The beauty of her and the youth of her—these, to MacDeal, were the devil in her.

Year by year her young heart hardened with rebellion. Her green-gold glance grew remote and overthoughtful. Early she scorned her mother for her spiritless subservience, and her contempt grew ever larger for MacDeal, her father, as his prayers grew longer in a blind determination to conquer and subdue the splendor of her spirit.

Where was his fire, she wondered? Had he no visions? Had he no dreams beyond the eternal *ba-a-a* of his stupid sheep? Had youth never been his?

That there was a great, magnificent world outside she somehow sensed and knew. Somewhere—in England, perhaps—were girls like herself. There, too, were young men—men not like the oldish youths of the Falklands, who were but as the sheep they tended.

Must a man always pray about everything? Had he no thoughts of his own? What was this God, anyway, this remote being with whom her father was on such intimate terms? It all seemed so stupid and false when there was no happiness, no glad intercourse with other people, no hope!

Some day something would happen. Some day a ship would come, and she would sail away on it, out into the other world,

where people smiled, where the sun shone and laughter was.

The whole world could not be like this sad land—MacDeal's Girl *knew* it! She was ready to stake her soul that some day she would know happiness, that somewhere there was a prince for her—a lover!

Ah, a lover! She breathed deep. When she thought of that, she flung herself out of the house. She could not stand it then. She wanted to be alone.

She evaded MacDeal. She avoided him whenever she could. She concealed her wild thoughts from her father and mother. Had they ever loved? The doddering two of them—it made her laugh to think that they could have loved. They had just married—she was sure of that. Love was different—she was sure of that, too.

Once, a long time ago, she had asked her mother about love.

"God is love," said the good woman.

"But *man's* love?" MacDeal's Girl had insisted.

Her mother had only stared in horrified hypocrisy, refusing to discuss it.

But now MacDeal's Girl was a full-matured woman. What little she had been permitted to read had only left her mind confused; but down deep in the soul of her was the belief, the utter conviction, that the beauty of her would lead to that love of which she dreamed. If not, why did she dream? Why the thrill of this unknown craving?

And so, at nighttime, and sometimes in the daytime, when she could steal away, she sought the cliffs by the sea. Out there in the open she seemed to find understanding, with her full, warm breasts leaning to the pressure of the cooling wind. These were the times when she shook her flaming hair loose and flung it forth like a banner of freedom. Then it was that she walked joyously, a queen of the earth and the sea and the sky, swaying her body, twisting, stretching, reaching up her arms and calling out to the sea gods to cast her up a lover.

Down underneath the rocks she had a cave all ready and waiting for him. Bit by bit she brought things to it—things from the house, things from the barns. Out of scraps of wool she braided mats for the floor. There she had a box or two and a broken chair. There was her refuge. There, when it rained, she lay on her back in the candlelight, dreaming of the love

that she knew not, and the lover that never came.

The devil was in MacDeal's Girl, but she guarded him carefully, slyly. Not often did she let him flare forth to reveal her true self to the watchful MacDeal; but on the rare occasions when this did occur, the storm was great.

Her mother stood dumbly by and watched them—her daughter and the father of her daughter, the clash of the two hard wills. The two of them were beyond her understanding—the brilliant, unanswerable demands of youth against the hard, grim, Bible-quoting stubbornness of the Middle Ages.

The bewildered woman looked on this wild, beautiful creature of her own act, this child of her body, a thing apart, a strange and different being. Why should the girl fight her father? After all, even if she was beautiful, she was only a woman, and a man must rule her—if not her father, then some other man, either more or less hard. That was life!

But MacDeal's Girl was strong. The rising sun of her soul could not be dimmed by the mists of repression. She sat in the mouth of her cave and watched the sea—the sea that had promised her a lover—and as she dreamed her flying fingers drove the needles in and out, fashioning a jacket. Ball by ball she had taken the yarn from the storeroom—soft homespun from the backs of the sheep of MacDeal's Station. When the jacket was done, she made her a tam o' shanter.

Gradually, in the making of jacket and cap, she had become oppressed by the sense of their drab grayness. Everything she had ever worn was made of that homespun gray, just as her whole life was.

And then she made a discovery. Down in the village the apothecary showed her the magic envelopes that contained the mystic message of color. *Dyes!* Why had they never told her before?

Penny by penny, she stole the money so that she could buy them. During all the years of evasion she became cultured in deception, so that now she counted on MacDeal's forgetting, or thinking he had counted wrong the coins in the little drawer.

II

THEN the day came. Her mother was visiting friends, and MacDeal was out on a far corner of the station; and in the

kitchen of the old homestead she went on the great adventure. Her gray homespun sweater and the ugly tam became a brilliant green. She worked swiftly, breathlessly, scouring the kettles, removing every vestige and trace. Then she fled to her cave, stretched a cord between a bush and a jutting rock, and there hung her treasures to dry.

While she sat there, watching them blow in the wind, she hummed the daring, frivolous tune of a song she had heard some sailors sing—drunken sailors from a ship that had been in port the year before. As she sang, she swiftly knitted a narrow girdle for the sweater. She made it long, with wool tassels on the ends. Also she cut and tied a pompom knot, and clipped it full and round and fuzzy, like those she had seen on the caps of the sailors from France.

At the next opportunity she dyed these a golden orange, and her best pair of homespun stockings she made the same bright green as the sweater. When they were dry, she smuggled them to her room. Three mirrors—all that there were in the house—she leaned against the wall, one precariously atop the other, so that for the first time in her life she saw herself in her own full, glorious length—the green stockings on her slender round legs, the green sweater with its orange girdle, the green tam with its bright orange pompom pulled down over her flaming hair.

She looked at herself, and could hardly believe. She was beautiful! She could see it!

The eternal fires of her leaped into dancing flames. She danced with them before that segmented mirror; and as she danced she sang that drunken sailors' song, gesturing, nodding, laughing with backflung head.

She held up her plaid skirt, and admired her green-clad legs. She twirled on her toes, and—she stopped suddenly short, her beautiful world tumbled in ruin.

Grim and stern, MacDeal stood there in the doorway and gazed on his daughter. Under his harsh command she came toward him fearfully. He met her in the center of the room and gripped her by the wrist.

His daughter! MacDeal's Girl a wanton! A bawdy of the byways in these gawdy garments! The kind of woman that fattens on drunken sailors and herdsmen! His daughter with a ribald song in her mouth and the evil of endless ages in her heart!

For the first time since she was a little girl she was physically afraid of him. A wild, insane terror penetrated her with a quivering fear that drove the color from her face and the heart from her body.

For a long moment she crouched away from him shuddering. Then, as he reached forward to grip her again, something broke within her. A wild frenzy of pent-up hate smashed through the crust of repression. She screamed as she leaped upon him blindly. Again and again she struck him viciously with her two fists, beating him in the face, on the chest and shoulders, screaming, screaming as she did so.

MacDeal came out of his surprise with a mighty curse. He crushed down her flaying arms. Struggling and kicking as she was, he lifted her up and flung her on the bed. She twisted out of his grip and leaped to her feet, standing there, high and unbeaten, on the far side of the bed. Her back to the wall, she faced him wildly defiant, her broken breathing chopped up into great tearing sobs.

For a moment she was out of his reach, and she used that moment in watching him warily, her eyes burning with hate. In blind, uncertain fury MacDeal leaned forward, with the flat of his great hands resting on the bed. She watched him, fascinated. With a desperate effort she tried to raise her strengthless, trembling hand to point at him as she spoke; but she felt herself sliding down into a pit of darkness.

MacDeal's Girl had fainted.

III

THAT night two great oceans met and wrestled on the Falkland shores, lunging up the cliffs in great, seething rushes of fury, receding, seemingly beaten, only to try again, pounding incessantly.

But the morning broke in sunshine, and with the sunshine came a large Norwegian tramp freighter into port. She had been badly used by the storm, and she rolled in like a drunken bum, disreputable of the sea that she was; but her coming meant gold for Port Stanley. It was always so when a storm-driven ship made port there—gold that the sailors spent, gold that the masters spent for repairs—the toll of the passage around the turbulent Horn. A high-priced haven was Port Stanley, for the Scot has his sense of values.

The Norwegian master and the Swedish first mate came ashore early from the tramp

—the master to dicker about the repairs, the mate for certain supplies. Port Stanley had watched them ashore, and was waiting for them.

The mate found the ship chandler and the general store, and concluded his business of the morning. Near noontime he stood outside the store door and looked out over the quiet village. It was a poor place to spend a fortnight. It was a lonely place for a reckless young sailorman who could have found excitement and entertainment in almost any other port—who, in fact, had friends in almost every important port in the world; for though the Black Swede was not yet thirty, he had been to sea for nearly twenty years and for almost as many generations.

Thoughtfully he slipped his big hand through a mane of wavy black hair—the black hair that gave him his name. For a little time he slouched his powerful young body lazily against the frame of the door. The sun was warm.

He wondered vaguely about the islands. It was his first visit here. Were there many people? What did they do? Most of those he had seen were men—hard, grim-looking fellows. What were their women like? The Black Swede absently whistled a gay tune from a Swedish light opera.

His glance traveled up the road, and paused. A short, stocky horse came trotting toward him, drawing a heavy cart. In the cart was a girl. The Black Swede kept on whistling nonchalantly, but he straightened up a bit as the cart stopped in front of the store.

The careless, graceful way in which the girl swung out of the cart held his fancy. The bright green sweater with its orange girdle was a thing hard to believe in such a God-forgotten part of the world.

As she bounded up the steps toward him, three or four sheep dogs standing around the entrance leaped upon her. The Black Swede had been a little dubious about those dogs. They didn't look very friendly; but the girl patted them a greeting, and cuffed them frankly when they got too boisterous. She glanced at the man indifferently as she went in, but she was thrilled.

Her eyes were a kind of greenish gold, he noticed, and the hair that showed under the green tam, with its jaunty orange pompom, was like a golden flame.

In a few minutes she came out again, and found him barring her way. For a mo-

ment neither said anything, and then they smiled, eyes into eyes. When they did speak, what they said doesn't matter so much. Youth has a way of making itself understood.

The Black Swede knew his English well enough, but he knew more than that—he knew himself. He knew life—and death, too, for that matter, and all the phases in between.

In his endless voyage around the world he had drifted on the tide of adventure with romance in his heart. From time to time he had lingered to the call of love. He had a way of reading aright the eager glow that comes to women's eyes. He was not surprised to see it flare in the eyes of MacDeal's Girl. Even here in this stark and stony land of the Falklands there was a breathing woman of fire!

The understanding blend of their spirits was so instantly mutual that there was no period of reserve between them. The Black Swede, reckless, young with the maturity of responsibility, mature with the youth of adventurous experience, looked at MacDeal's Girl and wanted her; and she, in the ignorance of her belief in life, felt herself suddenly lifted out of the depths of submergence into the glorified understanding of realization.

Her lover had come! He had been drifted to the starved shores of her being like a cask of wine cast up on the beach of a desert island. The gods of the sea had answered her longing, just as she had known they would.

The blackness of yesterday's despair fell away into forgotten nothingness. There was nothing in her eyes to-day but the heartbeat of the day itself, and of those that were bound to follow. MacDeal's Girl had found love!

Her spirit reached eagerly toward his like a great wave leaping high to mingle its crested spray with the sunlight. The surging craving that had made her conscious of her beauty, that had compelled her to rebellion, had found its vindication. That strange restless stir and starved sense of wistful wanting now revealed its reason.

Let her father have his empty God-love! Let the hypocrisy of his aimless prayer give him water for blood in his stern and loveless heart! MacDeal's Girl was free. Man-love had come and found her ready for loving, justifying her faith in the sun god of voiceless dreams.

Had MacDeal known, he would have attempted to interfere. It was well that he didn't, for the Black Swede would probably have killed him and taken her anyway.

While the Norwegian tramp was in port, they met on the cliffs, in secret. Hand in hand they leaned against the gale, wind-whipped youth with the spray of dreams in their eyes.

The magnificent banner of her hair was ever a flame in his heart. The utter strength of him, his sure fearlessness, thrilled her to the stars. Together they found the sea again, and the sky. On a full, brilliant day they looked at each other and wondered to find themselves real. The sun and moon and clouds were theirs. The cave was theirs—the candlelight and the dusk of darkness.

There had from the very first been no question of parting, no thought of parting. The great forever was theirs; and they took it then, so that it could be. When the fortnight had flashed itself into the past, the Norwegian tramp pushed her nose out of the harbor of Port Stanley, toward Buenos Aires, with a slender figure in a brilliant green sweater standing on her stern deck, held close in the arms of the Black Swede.

IV

THE end of a dream is only its beginning. The slow voyage on that deliberate tramp steamer suited the spell of their sweeping delight in each other.

In Buenos Aires he took her to an inexpensive boarding house near the water, so that he would be with her all his spare time between duties aship and ashore. It was late, on the last night before starting for Rio, before he could leave the ship. Along in the gloom of the docks he swung with ever quickening stride toward MacDeal's Girl, who eagerly waited his coming.

Never before in his life had his dominance and power been so much in evidence as since he had found love in the Falklands. It was inevitable that this very appearance of strength should raise antagonisms, should build barriers of fear and envy, make troubles and enemies. There had been difficulties aboard ship during the voyage. There were always such difficulties, but the Black Swede had a way of handling them. That's why he was a first mate and still a youth; but he who never had borne malice himself was the last to look for malice in others, and so the surprise was complete.

Out from behind the gloom of a great pile of lumber they came—five of them, a silent, vicious pack, leaping upon him with a suddenness that almost downed him at the first rush.

The Black Swede was alive and fighting from his knees as he struggled to regain his momentary loss of footing. With first one hand and then the other, time after time, he planted the bone and sinews of his mighty fists into the vicious faces that advanced and receded with the tide of battle. Silently they fought, with a grunt or a squealing snarl as a blow went home, as one of his heavy sea boots crashed into heaving stomach or straining thigh.

Slowly he cleared a way so that he could get his back to the lumber pile, and there he made his stand. Gradually it dawned on him that he was in deadly peril. There was no slinking off after a man had gone down. There were still five men in front of him. The seconds dragged into hours, it almost seemed, after he realized that they were out to finish him.

He was fighting for love and life and MacDeal's Girl; but the smashing power of his mighty lunges began to lose its accuracy, and then he knew that he was tiring. The mighty Black Swede to go down like this, beaten into insensibility in a dock fight! Humbled by a few bums of his own crew, who hated him because of his power and force of purpose!

He leaped into them, raging, crashing blow on blow into faces and bodies. Now there were only four!

He stepped back for an instant's breathing, knowing almost as he did so why the fifth had deserted for the moment; for a heavy timber rolled down from the top of the lumber pile and crushed him to his knees. His great hands groped on the splintered floor of the dock and grasped an iron bar. With a yell he was at them, but he was only halfway to his feet when the first knife thrust caught him full in his unprotected back. His bar crushed a skull, but the knife, withdrawn, sucked the life out of him from between his ribs.

Again he swung his weapon; but this time the knife reached deep into his uncovered side as the descending bar obliterated another face. He swung wildly then, and that searching, killing knife found his vitals again. With a sobbing, whispered scream he swung the bar again, but it flew out of his weakening hands.

For a stark, dead instant he swayed on outspread feet. Then he lunged aimlessly with limp fist, no more than a ludicrous gesture. That terrible knife once more!

Panting through gritted teeth, they dragged him to the edge of the dock, went through his pockets, and then quietly rolled him over into the outrunning tide. The splash was as of a keg fallen overboard. Furtive forms staggered into the shadowless darkness, and the night grew very still.

It was the end of the Black Swede and of the dream of MacDeal's Girl.

V

It was one of those velvet nights that belong only to Buenos Aires, languid with the warm sense of a tenseness just past—a night for love and life and gayety, or hate and death and sorrow.

MacDeal felt none of these. MacDeal was filled only with righteous resentment. The long search for his runaway girl had failed. MacDeal's pride was in mourning. His girl had turned wanton, to go off with a Swedish sailor on a tramp ship!

He sat down on a bench in the park along the Avenida, and filled his pipe from his sheepskin pouch. It was long after midnight. He must face the fact of failure in his search, and return to the Falklands and the wife.

He did not know what had got into his wife—always, before, so mild and submissive to his will, now so determined to have her daughter back, regardless of cost or disgrace. What mattered it if the girl had sinned? It was her girl as well as his, she told him, and she wanted her back. Praying wouldn't do her any good. What she needed was kindness and forgiveness and gentleness.

The woman must have gone daft. She must have lost her faith in God; but, just the same, MacDeal had followed his girl to Buenos Aires and had hunted for her there conscientiously. He was nothing if not conscientious; but he was stupid in this strange land of the Spanish tongue. This great city of grandeur and confusion was not at all like Port Stanley, or his station, where fed his fat, placid sheep.

As he sat on his bench, pondering ponderously on the ways of women, a long shadow cast by a near-by lamp fell across his feet. An instant later the voice of the man who belonged to the shadow greeted him pleasantly in Spanish.

MacDeal could not understand, and said so in his broad Scotch—whereat the young man laughed. It is not extraordinary, yet not particularly common, a meeting in a public park in Buenos Aires, or any other city of the world, between a Scottish Falkland Islander and a Canadian.

When the stranger spoke again, the English language sounded pleasantly to MacDeal, so much so that he was almost gracious in offering the match for which the other man asked. MacDeal was never too free with his matches.

The young Canadian had been walking slowly through the park with an attitude of lingering, because the night was like that, and because the Canadian himself was like that, too. On such nights he felt kindly to all the world, filled with a great human gentleness.

Youth is not often gentle, but the Canadian was ever sensitive to the unhappiness of others. It always stopped him short in his journey. It stopped him there in Buenos Aires, on that velvet night, as he walked through the park along the Avenida—just the sight of an old man sitting dejectedly on a bench; an old man who suffered sternly, but obviously.

At first the old fellow was silent and difficult, but he yielded up a match, so that the Canadian could light his pipe. After a long time, bit by bit, after they got to talking, MacDeal's version of the story of his girl came forth.

It was such a tale of sanctimonious persecution and oppression that the Canadian was aghast. The man talked of God and punishment and wickedness and sin, but said nothing about love and beauty and youth. The stupid hypocrisy of it all was almost unbelievable. The Canadian told him so—told him that if the girl had come to harm, the sin was his own; that he never had deserved to have her at all, let alone to get her back. As far as finding her was concerned, that probably would be easy, if gone about in the right way; but the Canadian was doubtful if the girl would be happy to be found by such a father, no matter what evil circumstances she might be in.

MacDeal had always been humble before God, but never before had he been humble before man. There was such an air of inspired, high-minded certainty behind the young Canadian's words that MacDeal's self-confidence was for once sub-

merged. He was driven to bargaining, and the Canadian exacted a pledge—that he would find the girl, or make every effort to find her, but MacDeal must bind himself not to molest her if they found her happy, irrespective of whether MacDeal approved of her situation or not.

The bargaining Scot bound himself, and the Canadian hailed a belated taxi in the very midst of his pledging. He moved fast to get the search under way—bewilderingly fast to the slow-minded MacDeal. His wide acquaintance in official circles and the press made the search a thorough one, and made the eventual finding of the girl almost inevitable.

It took three days. Then they found her there in that boarding house down near the water, where she had waited in vain for the return of the Black Swede. Some one had brought her the news of his death and of the manner of it, but she was so desperate in her grief that she would tell them no word of it.

Her father was clumsily and harshly kind. She expected upbraiding and vilification and prayer, when they suddenly walked in on her, but there was none of that.

That the young Canadian held her father in hand seemed somehow to percolate through the dull cloud of her suffering. She realized vaguely that he was her salvation. He was so human, so understanding!

He stood there with his clean-groomed bulk in her small room, and lifted her up out of the void of dejection. He made her aware of the desire to keep on living. He gave her the vision of the future through eyes just opened by the immediate past. He talked of love and life as she knew and thought of them. He saved her reason and restored the confidence that the passing of the Black Swede had so deeply shaken. He brought to her the realization that life for her had just begun, and had not ended at all.

This all in a few days, and then she found herself dully acquiescent, boarding the boat bound for home. The Canadian was there to see them off—there with his calm, quiet friendliness and sympathetic understanding.

As long as she lived, she would never forget that gentleness. The utter spontaneity of his belief in love and life as she felt it was the bulwark of her existence right then. The Black Swede had given her love in all

its splendor; but the Canadian had planted in her soul a sense of being, an all-revealing measure of values that strengthened the beauty of her spirit so that it could stand against the world.

VI

THE Rev. Thomas Ferguson sat in his study, with a letter before him on his desk. Outside, the Canadian winter piled deep the white drifts against the side of the parsonage, swirling in rattling eddies the fine, hard grains of snow dust against the outer windows. It was bitter cold, but neither colder nor more bitter than was the heart of Thomas Ferguson.

His wife paused at his study door and hesitatingly looked in on him, but passed on hurriedly into the kitchen when he merely glared at her. Immediately afterward he went over and harshly slammed the door. Thomas Ferguson wanted to be alone, to pray.

All the morning long he sat there with his hard old eyes on those crabbed, inky lines. It was a letter from a stranger to a stranger, a letter from a godly man to a man of God, from a man named MacDeal, in the far-off Falkland Islands, to a man named Ferguson in a little village in northern Canada. Old men, both—hard, grim-visaged, tight-hearted old men, who believed firmly in prayer and the soul's damnation.

The son of Thomas Ferguson had performed a service for this man MacDeal in the city of Buenos Aires, and the good man had written the young man's father a painful letter of gratitude.

It was about my daughter that I had gone there. The girl turned wanton and ran away on a ship with a drunken sailor. I would have let her go, knowing that God would punish her as she deserved, but her mother is weak in faith and would not be comforted. After many days of prayer the Lord sent a ship, a British man-of-war, and I persuaded her commander to let me go on her with him to Buenos Aires, her next port of call.

Though I hunted for days, I could not find my girl, and I thought to give up the search when I accidentally found your son in a park. He had friends, it seemed, in the newspapers and among the police. Their assistance was very great, and we found her—abandoned, as I had expected, and suffering for her sin. I prayed for her that she might seek God and His forgiveness; but she was dumb with grief in her wickedness, and would not.

Your son had told me that you, his father, are a man of God. Though he did me this service, I feel it my duty to say to you how far he has departed from the teachings of his boyhood. He encouraged my girl in her wickedness. He condoned her fault, and condemned me, her father,

for the blame of it. She came back with me quiet enough, but the devil is in her. She will not pray. She is unrepentant, and will be damned as she deserves if I cannot bring her to the light.

Your son encouraged her in her sin. That she looked on him with wanton eyes I do not for a moment doubt; but I feel that I would not be doing my Christian duty to you as a man of God if I did not warn you of his departure from the paths of righteousness.

The friendly counsel of a godly man to a man of God! The son of Thomas Ferguson had strayed from the faith of his father!

VII

Of course, MacDeal's Girl had not really believed that her father could suddenly change to gentleness; but she had been so beaten, so afraid in her loneliness and sorrow, in terror of that great city of overwhelming movement, speaking a strange, bewildering language, flaunting sunshine and happiness in the face of her misery! She had been so beaten that she followed the old man dumbly back to the dreary home land.

On the first day of the voyage he had seemed kind—gruffly, austere—kind—till he found her with the book. It was a book of verses, poems of love and life, which the young Canadian with the grave, understanding eyes had given her at parting.

"You have had love—you have known happiness," he had told her. "The time of it was short, but it was yours—something of beauty which no sadness can destroy—something which no one can take away from you."

When MacDeal saw the book, he snatched it from her hand. With grim, hard eyes, he scanned a page at random.

God had not punished her enough, it seemed, this wanton daughter of his! He glared at her savagely for a long moment. Then, cruelly, deliberate, he threw the book

far out into the water. Without a word he turned and left her there—left her with the full understanding of what her lot was to be in the home she was going back to. She might have known he was changeless!

However, it was not as one afraid that she took up the burden of living again in the old house. Something had happened to MacDeal's Girl. He could pray over her, he could taunt her with her shame; but she held her head high. Dauntlessly she bloomed more beautiful than before. Serenely she went on her way, saying little, never defending herself, smiling sometimes. Poised lightly on her long, slender legs, her young body swaying slightly, she would look at MacDeal out of her clear young eyes with a candor that baffled him.

She wore her bright green sweater without question now. Openly she sought the cliffs and the cave of her dreams. Without words, calmly and unafraid, she defied him. She flung the shining mane of her hair to the breeze, and walked buoyantly and joyously with the freedom of abandon, where once she had done so furtively.

She *was* joyous now! Her thoughts slanted backward to the young Canadian and what he had said. She had had love, she did know happiness, and no one could take it from her. Always would the black waters of her father's bitterness beat uselessly against the unshaken wall of her supreme calm. Life was hers, and a glory that was utterly out of his reach.

Beyond all that there was her revenge—a keen, poignant, unrelenting revenge that would torture MacDeal as long as he lived.

MacDeal's Girl had flung her arms wide and made her vow to the storm gods of the sea. He would never, never know that the captain of the Norwegian tramp had married her to the Black Swede. He would always think that his grandchild was a child of sin.

THE LOOK

SOME Love beguiles with siren melody,
And some he takes in laughter and surprise;
To some he tells the ageless mystery
In one long, silent meeting of the eyes.

When your soul entered mine and bided there,
The look you gave will bless my latest breath;
In it were wrapped the holiness of prayer,
The surge of life the sovereignty of death.

Neeta Marquis

The Charm

HOW JULES GUILBAULT FOUND HEAVENLY AID IN A TIME OF
SORE NEED

By William Merriam Rouse

TWICE since morning the face of Mlle. Thaïs Lancot had begun to freeze. On seeing the warning white spots upon cheeks and chin, the two men, Guilbault and Boyer, had leaped from the *traineau* and with handfuls of snow gently but swiftly rubbed out the frost. It was now noon; and even with the sun as high as it would go that day over northern Quebec, white appeared for the third time on the cheeks of *mademoiselle*.

"This is enough, Thaïs," said Jules Guilbault, when they had again restored good red blood to the face of the girl. "You must be warmed at once, and thoroughly, even if we have to make camp here at the side of the road."

"We can do better than that!" exclaimed Gustave Boyer. "You saw that half broken road we passed a little while ago? Well, at the end of it there is a house. A chopper named Paquet, or something like that, lives there. We're halfway to Ste. Rose du Dégel now. Suppose we stop at the house of this Paquet, eat, get warm, and go on? It's the only house on the road, and there's a moon to-night, so it won't matter greatly if we are delayed somewhat."

"Yes!" cried the girl. "Let us do that, my Jules! I've tried not to complain, but truly the cold is terrible to-day."

"Thaïs!" Guilbault was shaken by an inward accusation of neglect. "I should have made camp, or turned back, or done anything rather than have you suffer!"

But Thaïs Lancot laughed.

"Foolish one! It is nothing; only let us go to the house of this chopper as quickly as we can."

By means of some lifting and argument with the willing but surprised horse, they turned the sleigh around without tipping over. In February the snow lies from four

to six feet deep, and to get off the packed and frozen roadway may mean a wreck.

"It must be forty below," muttered Jules, as he urged the horse on. "I should have known better than to start with you, Thaïs!"

"Yes?" she whispered teasingly, and pressed her mittened hand against his arm. "Not for your wedding, Jules?"

He turned and looked down at her adoringly; for he and Thaïs were on their way to the priest at Ste. Rose du Dégel to be married that evening. The next day they would drive to the railroad at Lac St. Jean, and then make the long trip to the city of Quebec for a week of splendor. It would be the longest journey that either of them had ever made.

It is said that fools and heroes are not far removed from each other, and that a really simple-minded man is related to both. Without doubt only Jules Guilbault, in all the vast country above the rivers, would have thought of asking his chief rival to be his best man.

That was what Guilbault had done, and he saw nothing either strange or amusing in it. Was it not true that Gustave Boyer had been his friend, and that he was a fine fellow? No one could deny it. Was it not true, also, that Thaïs Lancot had been fond of Boyer before she had promised herself to Jules? Certainly. They were, therefore, all friends. It was quite simple.

From the little neighborhood where a few families had won homes from the forest it was thirty miles to the village of Ste. Rose du Dégel. The three in the *traineau* had been on the road since morning, and the men themselves were not sorry when, at the end of a wandering and poorly made by-way, they saw a house of unhewn logs. It was something between the *cabane* of a

chopper and the home of a *habitant*, a farmer.

They drove under a shed and blanketed the horse without having stirred any sign of life. Not even a dog barked.

"*Parbleu!*" muttered Boyer. "The *bon-homme* is stingy with his wood. There's no smoke coming out of the chimney."

Guilbault was already pounding at the door, with an anxious eye upon the face of his betrothed. No answer came from within, and, after a moment of waiting, he lifted the latch and pushed open the door. It is the unwritten law in the woods that one may do this, for a barred door in winter might mean death to the man outside.

Thaïs ran at once to the stove, and began to unwind her great woolen muffler. She revealed a face to command a second look from any man, in city or country—a face conscious of its own beauty. Her great dark eyes flashed about the room.

"It's a man living alone," she said, with conviction. "He must be out at work now. Look! He hasn't washed the dishes for two or three days."

"But he should be in for dinner at this time," said Boyer, throwing off his sheep-lined coat.

Gustave Boyer was a strong fellow, with the easy carriage of one who had traveled, and had even lived for a time, in the States—a great contrast to the broad-shouldered, deliberately moving Jules. It was Jules who nursed the fire up from a small bed of coals and made it roar a welcome to them. They warmed their hands and feet, and the men lighted their pipes.

The kitchen and living room in which they sat was more disorderly than dirty, as if a man's wife had been gone for a week. There was none too much household furniture, and some of that was homemade. The place spelled poverty, but not suffering. There was at least one other room, for a door led out of the kitchen.

Guilbault had brought in the package of food that they carried. As soon as a little of the stiffness went out of his fingers, he opened it and began to spread its contents upon the table. At this moment it happened that the three of them were silent—Thaïs and Jules getting the meal ready to eat, and Gustave stirring up the fire.

Suddenly Thaïs let a knife fall clattering to the floor. She stood with her wide eyes filled with alarm, and her head lifted to listen.

"*Mon Dieu!*" she whispered. "What was that?"

Boyer straightened up from the stove.

"What was what?" he asked.

"Didn't you hear it?" She turned to Jules. "It sounded like a groan!"

Guilbault had heard something, with his keen woodsman's ears, but he was not sure what the sound had been or whence it had come. Before he could reply to Thaïs, a moan drifted through the room. It did not seem to come from anywhere. It floated upon the air, unlocalized, not loud, but distant and carrying anguish.

"It's a ghost," said Gustave jestingly; but his ruddy face grew a little pale.

"Find out, one of you, what that sound is and where it comes from," cried Thaïs impatiently. "It makes the hair of one's head rise!"

"Try that door," suggested Boyer.

Guilbault was already on the way. He lifted the iron latch and pushed tentatively. The door swung open, but upon the threshold he paused with his gaze held inside.

"Our Lady!"

His voice died away. Thaïs and Gustave, after a moment of hesitation, rushed to his side.

II

THEY saw a small sleeping room, more orderly than the kitchen, but not better furnished. From a blanket-filled bunk in one corner a human face looked toward them—a face which revealed, although the bunk was far from the single window, sickness and delirium. The eyes saw, and did not see. As they gazed, another moan came from the half open mouth.

"*Mon Dieu Seigneur!*" breathed Thaïs.

"The poor one!" cried Jules Guilbault.

He stepped into the room. Both Thaïs and Gustave caught at his sleeve.

"Be careful, Jules!" exclaimed Boyer. "There's been smallpox in the parish this winter!"

Guilbault went on, unheeding, and stopped at the side of the bunk. Like a mummy the still figure lay, wrapped and banked about with blankets, so that no wandering current of air could do harm.

For a little moment Jules remained silently looking down. Then he squared his shoulders, drew a deep breath, and turned away from the eyes that searched his own without knowing that he was there.

"A youngster—very ill," he said quietly.

It is not unlikely that the secret of what he had seen was written in his face, for Thaïs and Gustave, white to the lips, backed away from that room and away from him as he followed them into the kitchen.

"What's the matter with him?" demanded Boyer hoarsely. "Is it smallpox?"

"Yes," answered Jules.

"Are you sure?" The fingers of Thaïs locked hard. "The rash?"

"Yes, the red rash—the delirium—the fever. He is sick to the border of death."

"Let's get out of here!" cried Gustave. "*Mon Dieu*, I would not stay to eat a mouthful if I were starving! Thank God you did not go in there, Thaïs!"

Boyer picked up his coat, and that of Mlle. Lanctot; but Guilbault did not move toward his own garment. He remained standing still, staring at them, and striving to clear his mind of a dozen conflicting emotions.

"Wait!" he commanded. "It looks as if this young fellow were alone. Is he Paquet, or has Paquet fled and left him? Has the chopper a family, Gustave?"

"Name of a name!" cried Boyer. "How do I know? I never saw him and I never was here before!"

"We can tell the priest at Ste. Rose du Dégel," said Thaïs, nervously, divining the thought of Guilbault. "He will send some one. We can get the doctor to come, Jules."

"Undoubtedly," agreed Jules. "*Monsieur le médecin* and *monsieur le curé* will both come, as always. But, *ma chérie*, in the meantime this youngster may die!"

"Can we help that?" asked Boyer. "Let's get out of here into the fresh air!"

"He is in the hands of *le bon Dieu*," added Thaïs.

"But yes!" exclaimed Guilbault, with a sudden rising of that stubborn streak which more than anything else had helped him to win Thaïs Lanctot from a half dozen others. "And so are we in the hands of the good God, my Thaïs!"

"Look here!" cried Boyer. "Are you hinting that we should stay and take care of this fellow? Do you want to catch the smallpox yourself? You, who are to marry Thaïs this evening? Certainly she cannot stay here!"

Jules Guilbault, torn by two powerful desires, instinctively reached to his breast. Without being conscious of what he did, he drew out the silver crucifix that he wore.

"A charm will not protect you!" Gus-

tave was becoming excited. "Smallpox is smallpox!"

"It is not a charm," replied Guilbault, looking down confusedly at the work of his fingers. "It is from the shrine of Ste. Anne de Beaupré, and it is only to remind me that *le bon Dieu* goes with us always—"

"Of course," interrupted Boyer impatiently. "We all know that; but you can catch the smallpox, like any one else. You may be mad, but Thaïs is not!"

"Whether I catch it or not," said Guilbault, in a voice that was very nearly a growl, "I am not going to leave a man to die alone. No priest, no doctor, no friend, with him! Why, this boy should have his mother!"

The eyes of Thaïs Lanctot grew dangerously bright, and Jules knew well enough that sign. With just such eyes he had seen her drive Henri Papineau, who had made himself objectionable, out of her father's house.

"This is our wedding day, Jules," she said.

"Yes, and the happiest day of my life, Thaïs; but the man in there is sick. He needs water, fire. It must be hard to die—alone!"

"It is impossible to be married alone," she told him, with a tone that seemed to remove her farther than the distance of the room.

"Ah, my Thaïs! Have pity upon this poor fellow! The priest will find you a place to stay overnight in Ste. Rose du Dégel. He will come or send help by tomorrow, and then I can go to you. It is only a day of our lives—for one who may be dying!"

"And you yourself, by that time, will be filled with the disease! It would be wonderfully fine to have smallpox upon one's honeymoon!"

"I will not catch—" began Guilbault.

"The devil!" cried Boyer. "Do you realize that you are risking giving it to Thaïs? You do not mind having your face marked forever, perhaps, but Thaïs—"

"*Nom de Dieu!*" she interrupted. "He thinks more of this chopper than he does of me! Heaven only knows what it will mean if he stays here!"

"It means that your marriage must be postponed for ten days, or three weeks, or whatever time it is that one waits to see whether he will have smallpox," said Boyer. "If he has it, then there will be more

weeks of waiting, at the best. Do not be a fool, Guilbault! Leave now while you have the chance!"

"I shall not catch it; but if I knew that I should, I could not leave this young man."

"*Ciel!*" from Gustave. "What a fool! Do you know what I would give to be in your place to-day? I would give half my life!"

"You would do better with the opportunity, I believe," murmured Thaïs; and the light in her eyes grew more dangerous.

Jules Guilbault, suffering as he never had before, looked from his betrothed to his friend and rival.

"Is it because you're afraid of spending an extra hundred years in purgatory, if you don't stay?" sneered Boyer.

"I am not staying because I fear," answered Jules slowly, "but because I pity."

Thaïs turned, with outstretched hands, to Boyer. "What shall we do, Gustave?"

Jules saw Gustave's lips draw together with sudden firmness. His eyes half closed.

"This thing has gone far enough," he said, as if he were delivering a final decision. "Thaïs, what do you want? I care enough for you to make this madman go on to Ste. Rose du Dégel with us, if you speak the word. He can be clubbed, if he cannot be reasoned with!"

For the moment Thaïs Lanctot did not reply. She studied first the face of Jules and then that of Boyer. Guilbault, as he realized the nature and earnestness of Gustave's offer, felt a real anger stirring. Was he not suffering enough from his quarrel with Thaïs? Let Gustave Boyer keep out of this affair!

"I am going to start immediately for Ste. Rose du Dégel," said Thaïs; "and to-night I shall marry the man who drives me there. You, Jules, you drove the horse to-day. Are you going to drive on now, or not?"

III

WHEN he had seen the terrible evidence of the scourge looking up at him in the other room, it had been to Jules Guilbault as if the earth were swept away from under his feet. Now it was as if the heavens also were rolled up and removed.

Up to the moment when Thaïs spoke, he had not understood that any such issue was arising. He had thought it was merely an argument, in which he must win ultimately because he was right. He knew now from

her voice, from remembrance of things that had gone before, from the look upon her face, from the answering understanding in the gaze of Boyer, that an unshakable resolution was behind her question. She had decided.

"Answer!" commanded Thaïs, lifting her chin. "I am going out of this pest-ridden house at once!"

"I cannot leave another man to death," said Jules thickly. "No—not even for you, Thaïs!"

Through a mist he saw them go, hardly believing his own eyes until the door closed and the knowledge that he was alone was borne in upon him swiftly, as a knife is thrust between the ribs. His strength turned to water. He sat down, and his head dropped forward upon the table.

"Lord Christ!" he whispered. "I have lost her! She will marry him!"

It was well for Jules Guilbault that there was the need of another to draw him out of his own despair. A little later, through his misery pierced the remembrance of the sick one there in the bedroom. Perhaps he heard a moan. He could not have told that, nor how long it had been since Thaïs and Gustave went out of the door. He got up slowly, as an old man rises from his chair, and walked into the bedroom.

There was sanity now in the suffering eyes that looked up at him. The cracked lips moved, and a word struck faintly through the silence.

"Water!"

Jules turned back to the kitchen and filled a tin cup. He bent over the bunk, worked his arm under the slender form, and lifted it. The blankets dropped away from the head and shoulders of the sufferer. A cascade of dull yellow hair fell over his arm.

"*Sacré bon Dieu!*" he swore, so forcibly that the water slopped from his cup. "It's a girl!"

Through the depths of the tortured brown eyes a momentary gleam of amusement passed.

He put the girl down again gently, and rearranged the blankets. Then he drew up a chair for himself.

There was, indeed, nothing in that pitifully blotched face to tell one whether it was the countenance of a man or a woman. Lack of a beard, and a lack of bulk underneath the blankets, had led him to assume that it was a young man. Now he felt sure that there must be some one else whose

home was in the house; for it was manifestly impossible that a girl—and this woman was very young—should live alone in the forest.

But temporary hope faded. It would not do him any good now if a hundred priests and doctors, fathers and mothers, should arrive. He wanted, however, to find out what he could from the girl.

"Where are your people?" he asked.

Her lips framed words haltingly, but with more ease since the drink.

"My father—Ste. Rose—for help."

"Is there no one else?"

"No one."

That explained, then, as well as need be. The condition of the house said that she had been ill for perhaps a week. The condition of the fire which they had found told Guilbault that her father had left that morning. If he had gone with a horse, he should return by nightfall; if on snowshoes, he could not be expected before some time the following day.

It mattered little, however, to Jules Guilbault when he came. There was no reason now for Jules to go on to Ste. Rose du Dégel. There was no pressing reason why he should go back to his own house—left so wonderfully neat in the expectancy of Thais. He was not sure that he wanted to go back there. Better strike north and north, to the far trails of the hunters and *les sauvages*.

Guilbault was not a man to sink into a lethargy of mourning. He went about the work that was there to be done with all the thoroughness of which he was capable. He got in a supply of wood, washed dishes, forced himself to eat a little, and made the sick room tidy. At intervals he gave the girl water. He watched her closely to see that she did not get uncovered and that there was no ominous change.

Of the care of smallpox he knew little, and fortunately he had no theories. She thirsted, therefore he gave her to drink. The light seemed to bother her, therefore he darkened the room as much as was practicable. It was indisputable that one ill in bed in that climate should be kept warm. Further than this he did not go, because he did not know how; and because of his ignorance nature's battle was not hindered. Through the day the girl did not get any worse, although at times she sank into delirium and into stupor.

As it drew near midnight, Guilbault gave up his vigil for her father, and, having lo-

cated the man's bunk in the loft, he went there to bed.

As he undressed, the candlelight brought a gleam from the silver crucifix that hung by a thin cord around his neck. He took it in his hand for a moment, and then let it fall back against his broad chest.

"No, it is not a charm," he muttered; "but surely *le bon Dieu* is with me now, although it seems that I have lost all. Somehow it must be for good. At least I am well, and as strong as a moose. If Gustave had fought! Ha!"

The father did not appear the next day. When night came, Guilbault began to suspect that he had deserted his daughter, incredible as such a thing seemed. Else what kept him? Nothing could happen to a man who had to travel a mere fifteen miles, and that over a fairly good road.

Still another day passed, and Jules resigned himself to an indefinite stay. He filled empty hours working at the wood pile, but he did not dare to go even as far as the main road, on account of the girl. She grew worse and better, better and worse. There were two nights when he slept on the floor by the stove, in order that he might give her water as often as her burning body cried out for it.

Then she began to get well, little by little. There came a time when she could speak a whole sentence at once—when she could bring forth a faint smile for him in the morning. He learned that her name was Valérie Paquet, and that she lived with her father, Thomas Paquet. She was worried because her father had not returned, but Guilbault did not tell her how many the days had been, and her sense of time had been lost during the period of delirium.

Scabs formed upon her face. Then they began to go. Jules did not know whether they were leaving lifelong marks, for her eyes had not been able to bear the light.

One day she asked for solid food. After she had eaten a little, her voice rang with the triumph of returning strength. She had certainly recovered from the scourge of the north, and in a very short time she would be herself again.

IV

THAT night, when Jules Guilbault went to bed, he felt ill. The next morning he awoke with a dry mouth, burning eyeballs, and a head that rang as if he had been drinking whisky *blanc* for a week.

Guilbault understood. Although he forced himself out of bed and downstairs to build up the fire, he got no farther than that. It required what strength he had, what will power, to hold himself upright in a chair by the table, and from time to time to put a stick of wood into the stove. He knew that it was his duty to prepare something for the girl to eat, that he must not give up. If he gave up, they might freeze in their beds.

At times the room swam to his gaze. An hour passed—two hours. He lifted a hand that seemed made of lead, and drew out from the breast of his shirt the silver crucifix that had come from the shrine of Ste. Anne de Beaupré. He held it in his big fingers, and a shaft of sunlight from the window struck white fire from the metal.

"It is only a charm," said Jules, "as Gustave told me!"

A little noise made him look up, and the crucifix dangled against his chest. In the doorway of the bedroom stood a girl; but surely this beautiful girl could not be Valérie Paquet!

She was holding to the door casing, it was true, as if from weakness; but her unmarked face was bright with a smile. Her dull yellow hair was coiled upon a proud little head, and the softness of her brown eyes gave the lie to the carriage of that head. A brown woolen dress was like a squirrel's coat upon her boyish slenderness. Yes, it was the same girl who had lain in misery through the long days!

As Guilbault stared at her, Valérie's face changed from joy to alarm. She crossed the room as rapidly as she could, staggering a little, and holding to the backs of chairs. She bent over him, and her hand gripped his shoulder.

"You are ill!" she cried. "You—why didn't you call me, Jules Guilbault?"

"Yes," he replied dully. "It has come—the smallpox—but I do not care."

"The smallpox!" She lifted his face in her hands, and searched his eyes, as if she feared he had suddenly gone mad. "What do you mean?"

"I have caught it," said Jules. "But it was not your fault, Valérie. You could not help it."

"Oh, *mon Dieu Seigneur!*"

She spoke the words so softly, and in such a way, that they were at the same time a prayer and a hymn of thanksgiving. Her face grew shining from within. Indeed, all

of her seemed to Guilbault to shine like the golden figure of the good Ste. Anne.

"He thought that I had the smallpox, and he risked his life to save a stranger!" she cried, and her voice lifted with the joy of a singing bird. "Has God made anything better than a man?"

"Smallpox!" insisted Guilbault stubbornly. "You had smallpox!"

"I had measles," she told him, patting the thick muscles of his shoulder. "Now you will have measles, and I, *Dieu merci*, I shall take care of you as never man was taken care of before!"

"Not smallpox?" exclaimed Jules. "Ha! It was not a charm, after all! *Le bon Dieu* was nearer than my own heart!"

"Come!" said Valérie, tugging at his arm. "You must get into my bed now, and I will take good care of you. If I did not, I think Heaven would send archangels to do it, Jules Guilbault!"

V

It was late in the day when Guilbault awoke from a delirium of thirst—awoke with the cool hands of Valérie upon his head and a cup at his lips. He drank, and looked up into the face of a stranger—an old man who smiled.

"Can you hear me, M. Guilbault?"

Jules moved his head.

"*Eh, bien!* I am Thomas Paquet. You have been saving my daughter's life alone, *monsieur*, because there is smallpox in Ste. Rose du Dégel, and for a time they needed every man to help. I knew you were here, because the two who left you hunted me up and told me; so I could not refuse to stay in the village."

"They—" whispered Jules. "They—are well?"

"As yet," answered Paquet gravely; "but M. Boyer and his bride did not dare to go on to Lac St. Jean, as they had planned."

"His bride!" Jules had something on his mind, and he felt that if he could say it at once he would live forever. "I love—Valérie. I—"

"Valérie," said the girl's own voice, softer to Jules Guilbault than moonlit waters, "is glad that she is your own, to do with as you please!"

"*Dieu merci!*" whispered Jules.

Then he drifted into a silence of great contentment, with her two hands cool upon his forehead.

Times Have Changed

A NOVEL OF UP-TO-DATE ADVENTURE IN THE BOHEMIA AND
THE SUBURBIA OF NEW YORK

By Elmer Davis

Author of "The Princess Cecilia," etc.

MAX O'RELL, formerly a New York newspaper man, but now principal of the high school in the highly respectable suburban town of Wynwood, is spending an evening in the city without his wife, for the first time since his marriage. He has come into town to attend a fraternity dinner, and incidentally to recover an old Salem quilt, a wedding present from his wife's aunt, which he has loaned to Bill Corliss, a friend of his newspaper days. He meets another friend, Byron Blish, who takes him to a musical comedy and introduces him to the leading lady, Lorna Lockwood.

Miss Lockwood lives at Mother McCurdy's, where Bill Corliss is also a roomer. It chanced that this same evening she has two visitors. One is Irene Laird, a stage-struck girl from Wynwood, who claims relationship, and begs the actress to help her to secure an interview with Belasco. The other is a former husband, Al Keeley, an ex-convict, whom Lorna has divorced. Al is trying to sell some diamonds which his partner, a crook known as Dirty Dan, has stolen from a supposed agent of the Russian revolutionists. For temporary security he slips the jewels into an old quilt in Lorna's room.

Dan is shadowing Keeley, whom he distrusts, to prevent any treachery with the diamonds. A tough-looking fellow, he alarms one of Mother McCurdy's tenants, who screams, bringing Mrs. McCurdy and a detective upon the scene. Donovan, the detective, arrests both Dan and Al. Al protests that he is only visiting his wife, and calls on Lorna to corroborate him.

XIII

LORNA LOCKWOOD took the spotlight while one after another, Al, and Donovan, and Mother McCurdy, and the fat lady with the sequins, and even Dan, told their stories. It was a great night for the audience—greatest of all for Irene, who huddled in the corner of the corridor behind Mother McCurdy and listened with shivering gleefulness.

So this was life in New York! She had thought splendor had reached its height at the theater, when she saw her own cousin playing across the footlights—playing a far smaller part, of course, than Irene would soon have, but still upholding the family's reputation in the dramatic art. That had been thrilling enough for one whose previous experiences of grandeur had never gone beyond the Elks' dances in Wynwood; but to come back from the theater into this real life drama, packed with tragedy, heart interest, and crime—Irene had never seen anything so thrilling, even in the pictures.

The only drawback was the inadequacy

of the star. Here Lorna had such a part in real life as Irene had dreamed of having on the stage, and she wasn't rising to it at all. No tears, no tenseness, no display of emotion; she merely leaned against the doorpost of her own room and listened to them all, rather indifferently, as if things like this happened every day.

"Yes, I used to be married to Al," she said, when they had all finished; "but not any more. He came up to see me before dinner, and I suppose he wanted to resume the conversation. He's all right, sergeant—burglary's too rough for him. Let him go."

"Let me stay, you mean," said Al boldly. "I want to talk to you, Lorna."

But she had seen his eyes wandering down the corridor to the dim figure of Irene.

"This is my busy evening. I wish you'd take him away, sergeant. Don't lock him up—he's harmless; but I don't want him falling over my feet."

This time Al's eyes were on the quilt, as he cried in a rather panicky tone:

"But I've got to see her, I tell you!"

Dan stirred restlessly, and Mother McCurdy's Colt prodded his ribs.

"You come along with me," said Donovan. "No, Miss Lockwood, we won't hold him unless we get something on him; but we'll take him out of your way. Now how about the other one—this friend of his?"

"No friend of mine," said Lorna. "Never saw him in my life."

"Then he comes, too."

"But, Lorna!" Al cried. "I've got to tell you something!"

She looked at him and through him. Her gaze ran over him from head to foot, and there was nothing in it but the perfection of disillusion.

"No, Al. You've told me all the words in the dictionary, and they don't get over—not any more. I don't wish you any bad luck, but I'm through."

"Then we're off," said Donovan. "Shut up, Keeley, or we'll hold you for annoyin' your wife."

"And get out of the way, all of you," Mother McCurdy commanded. "What do you think this is—an auction?"

Al tried to reassure Dan by cautious jerks of the head as they went downstairs, but Dan evidently didn't understand the code. He was frowning; his handcuffed fists were still clenched; and the terror of Dirty Dan was stronger on Al than any terror of the police. What would Dan say when he learned that the diamonds were still in Lorna's room?

If Dan were locked up, of course, he wouldn't find out for a long time. Al even turned over the possibilities of trying to get Dan sent away; but he knew nothing on Dan that wouldn't incriminate himself. Even if he should be lucky enough to send Dan to Sing Sing without disclosing the diamond transaction, he was in mortal fear of what Dan would do to him after he got out. A man who wasn't afraid of the whole red revolution wouldn't make more than two bites of Al.

No, on second thought it seemed to Al that he would have to stick to Dan. The diamonds were out of reach for the moment, but the padding was thick in the old quilt, and it wasn't likely that Lorna would find them. Besides, Lorna had said she was going to the Palette Club masquerade to-night. The Palette parties lasted till daybreak—or had in the old days. They would have the night before them, if the police let them go. They could recover the

diamonds somehow. In any case, Al decided, he wouldn't double-cross Dan. He didn't want to be found with his toes up.

If Dan had known all this, he would probably have been more cordial in the green wagon that presently took them both away.

Up in the little room at the end of the corridor Lorna Lockwood closed the door, hung up her hat, and then peered into the closet.

"Let's see," she muttered. "Ought to have some kind of costumes we could wear to this riot. Pity my clothes won't fit you; but we can make something up."

Irene was huddled in the armchair, her eyes shining.

"Cousin Lorna!"

"Well?"

"I think you have the most romantic life!"

Lorna stopped, her arms full of clothing, and looked at the girl in amazement.

"Me? Huh!"

"He must love you, Cousin Lorna, to come back like that!"

Lorna turned back to the pile of clothing and began to hold up one gown after another for inspection.

"And are you parted forever?" Irene persisted.

"We certainly are. Here, I guess I can wear this old thing. No moth holes in it." She held up a *Pierrot* costume of heavy white silk, with big black pompoms as big as her fists. "Won't I be the la-la? Give me a jackass and a drum, and you wouldn't know me from Caruso. Now let's see what we can do for you."

"I don't see how you can think about such things," said Irene, rather reproachfully, "when a man who meant so much in your life has just gone off to jail!"

"Oh, you get used to anything. Jail's nothing new for him. Here now—this ought to go with your complexion." Lorna held out a frilly blouse of red *crêpe de Chine*. "And your tam's all right. Just you let me dress you up, child, and we'll make you a fine Spanish cavalier. How about it?"

It was rather hard to distract her cousin from the romantic adventures of the missing Al, but when Lorna had set herself to work over Irene's costume the girl recovered her interest. She had never been at a costume ball in her life, she confessed; and a masquerade where she would certain-

ly see famous actors and artists, and might even be asked to dance with them, was an unexpectedly exciting beginning for her career in New York.

The costume that Lorna devised for her was exciting, too. It began with a pair of dancing pumps and long black silk stockings. Then came a pair of black silk trunks, mementos of a dancing number in some musical comedy of years ago; the scarlet blouse, which, with a safety pin here and there, could be made into a plausible imitation of a doublet; the black tam, Irene's only contribution to the ensemble; and a black opera cape lined with scarlet silk. With a black domino covering Irene's glass eye, she was as satisfactory and as attractive a Spanish cavalier as anybody could expect to meet at a costume ball.

When the girl from Wynwood looked at herself in Lorna's glass, she was sufficiently impressed to exclaim:

"Oh, Cousin Lorna! I never looked so well in my life. I wish *he* could see me!"

Lorna grunted.

"Good job he can't. You'd scare him right back home to his wife."

"You don't know him," Irene sighed. "He longs for romance, too; but his sense of duty—"

"Well, let's forget the sense of duty for a while. Our duty to-night is to dance around and amuse ourselves. Now let me clamber into my alias."

In two minutes more Lorna was masked and costumed, with a tweed raincoat over the white blouse and bloomers. She paused for a last glance around the room.

"Everything's all right, I guess. We can go downstairs and phone for a taxi. Wait a minute! It's so warm now you won't need this."

She picked up the quilt and looked at it with wrinkled nose.

"Frowzy old thing! Well, I mended it, anyway. Funny—I forgot I'd done that. Al coming in must have driven it out of my head; or maybe I'm losing my mind in my old age. We'll just put this back where we got it. When we come home, friend Irene, we'll be too sleepy to bother with housecleaning. Who wants a quilt on a night like this?"

The lock clicked behind them—Lorna made sure of that, this time. They paused in the corridor for an instant while she threw the quilt back into the big white wardrobe.

"There now, child—all our troubles are off our minds. I will now introduce you to the justly celebrated night life of New York!"

XIV

It was nearly an hour later when Blish and O'Rell came out of Dondin's and slowly made their way through the crowds that swarmed along the sidewalks of Broadway.

"See what living in the country will do to a man," said O'Rell. "I'd forgotten the crowds were like this."

"They weren't, my boy—they weren't. In the merry old days you went straight from the theater to somewhere else; but now, when you come out of the theater, everything else is shut up, and there's no place to go but home. Our fellow citizens haven't got around to the idea of going home just yet; so they all prowl the streets for half an hour or so, and then they finally give up and slide back into the subway. By twelve o'clock nobody will be out but taxi drivers and street cleaners; but just now all the burghers are abroad."

"I was thinking," said O'Rell, "that it might be a little hard to explain, if anybody asked me why I was carrying a quilt."

Blish looked at him in admiration.

"There is still hope for the patient. So that idea is at last beginning to fight its way into your bean, is it? Now am I right? Do we forget this quilt, and tell your family that the house was unfortunately destroyed by fire?"

"We don't," said O'Rell firmly. "We'll get that quilt and take it with us. I was just figuring on ways and means."

"You can't put the thing in your pocket, you know," said Blish rather plaintively. "Better forget it!"

"Look here, Byron, you're wasting your breath. Love me, love my quilt. Where I go it goes. Unless that's understood, the party is off."

"I must say," said Blish, with a sigh, "that you're getting pretty darned dictatorial. You didn't used to be this way. Was it the army, or teaching school?"

"Dictatorial!" said O'Rell. "Good God!"

"I get you, my boy—I get you. You can't let it out at home, so you have to bring it across the river and take it out on Byron. Well, kid, I forgive you; but you don't know how happy that little home would be if you only got up courage to tell

the wife where she got off. As an experienced married man, let me give you a little advice. To-morrow, when you go home, give her the devil. Ask her how she dares run off like this into the mountains and leave you to get your own breakfast. Give her the scare of her life. Then, when she's weeping all over the rug, clasp her in your loving arms and plant the kiss of forgiveness on her brow. That's the way I do it, and it never fails."

"Byron, you rave. While you rave, I think, and by thinking I arrive at a solution of our troubles."

"What's that? Send the quilt by registered mail?"

"Not at all. I stop on the corner—thus; I buy a paper from this hardworking boy—thus—keep the change, son; and with this paper we wrap up our quilt so that nobody will know what it is when we walk out into the crowd."

"I knew it! The shock of getting back to the old gang has unhinged his reason. However—"

"That's the place," said O'Rell. "Right across the street. Now, if Corliss didn't forget, and give me the wrong key—"

"Wait a minute—I'm out of cigarettes."

They stopped at the little lunch counter just across the street from Mother McCurdy's. O'Rell stared at the darkened, ominous front of the rooming house, for the first time beginning to realize some of the hazards of the enterprise.

But there was no hazard so great as the hazard of going back to Aunt Cordelia without the quilt. It was a painful and perhaps a dangerous duty, but it had to be done. O'Rell had had experience in the army of painful and dangerous duties that had to be done; so it was natural enough that his mind turned back to the old habits of army days, and he found himself surveying the house across the street as if it had been a hostile trench.

Behind him Blish lit one of his cigarettes and tossed a twenty-dollar bill to the cashier.

"Lot of money to be slingin' around," said the cashier, as he rang the register bell. "But this block has had its nightly crime, son, so I guess you're safe."

"Nightly crime?"

"Oh, yes—there's one every evening. Generally a holdup, but this one to-night was burglars. It was right across the street."

"What? Over there at Mother McCurdy's?"

"Right there. I saw the wagon backed up to the door to take 'em off."

"Didn't know there was anything in that place worth stealing."

"I wouldn't try it," said the cashier frankly, "while the Ritz and the Biltmore was still open; but the cop on the beat tells me they got a couple of birds sneakin' through the hall."

"Did you hear that?" said Blish nervously, as they passed out on the sidewalk.

"I heard it. What of it? They wouldn't take my quilt."

"What of it?" wailed Blish. "Do you suppose a house that has been robbed once to-night has gone to sleep? They'll be listening for every step. Before we can get to this quilt, we'll be in the Tombs!"

"Byron," said O'Rell thoughtfully, "do you know what Emerson said?"

"Who? Jack Emerson? Say, he and I are pals."

"No, I don't mean the president of the Actors' Equity. I refer to the other Emerson. That Emerson, Byron, said, 'Trust thyself; every heart vibrates to that iron string.' Now shall we vibrate together, or will you stay here on the curbstone till I come back with my quilt?"

"Oh, I vibrate, kid—I vibrate. Only hurry up!"

They crossed the street and mounted the steps, and nobody interfered with them. Once inside, they climbed the stairs unchallenged. It was easier than O'Rell had expected to find the white wardrobe. He opened the door cautiously, peered inside, reached toward the upper shelves, and then emerged with a sigh of relief, and with the quilt over his shoulder.

"I hope you're happy," whispered Blish nervously.

"I am. If anybody else had tampered with it, I don't know how I'd ever square myself."

"At it again! Make your wife do the squaring."

"Well, I'll promise you this, Byron—the quilt is the only thing on my mind now. If I bring it back safe, the family won't worry about anything else. I wouldn't go so far as to say that there will be no questions asked, but this quilt will be a sufficient answer. Now where is that paper? We'll wrap it up."

Rather clumsily they did so, and tied it

with a string that O'Rell found in the rubbish on the wardrobe floor. Neither of them was an expert in doing up packages. When they had finished, the result was only a rather obvious and unmistakable quilt, which somebody had vainly tried to disguise by tying a newspaper around it.

"Looks worse than ever," said Blish. "And it's too big to go under one arm—one of my arms, anyway. Why don't you take it out and drop it into an ash can?"

"We could take it down to the station in a taxi and check it," O'Rell suggested.

"Oh, no, my boy! Once you get within sight of the choo-choo cars, the homing instinct of the commuter will get you. I take no chances. Sling it over your shoulder—there. Immigrants arriving from Poland. We're off!"

They went down the corridor and down the stairs. Coming up the stairs wheezed a fat woman, who looked at them in amazement as she stood aside to let them pass; but O'Rell stared in her eyes so boldly that she said nothing. Blish, glancing back from the floor below, saw that she had stopped and was looking down at them.

"Say, did you get your winter overcoat?" he said loudly. Then he hurriedly jammed his elbow in O'Rell's ribs with a whispered, "Say no!"

"No," responded O'Rell, beginning to understand.

"Well, no use going back for it now. We can get that in the morning when we say good-by to Mother McCurdy."

As they went down the last flight of stairs, they heard the slow thud of the fat woman's footfalls as she resumed her climb. A moment more, and they were at the door. They closed it behind them, and stood in safety on the top of the stoop, looking down on a deserted street. The crowds had realized that it was home or nothing.

"How about that?" said Blish delightedly. "Wasn't that pretty smooth? Ah, Marky, what would you do without Byron? Napoleon is my middle name. Oh, Lord, there's a cop!"

"What of it, Napoleon?"

"He's looking this way! He's looking at us! He's coming after us! Oh, Lord!"

"Trust thyself," said O'Rell imperturbably. "If you can't do that, trust me."

"What 'll you say if he stops you?"

"I'll tell him the truth."

O'Rell calmly went down the steps to the sidewalk, and turned down the street to-

ward the policeman, who, rather uncertainly, was approaching.

"Not the truth!" said Blish. "Not the truth! It won't get over. Anything but the truth!"

O'Rell ignored him.

If they had been real burglars, they might very well have escaped unchallenged; for the policeman was plainly hesitant, and inclined to suspect that he would be a fool to interfere with these respectable-looking persons, who seemed so conscious of their own innocence. But the effect was just a shade overdone. A trace of bravado in O'Rell's manner, a trace of nervousness in Blish's—and just as the policeman walked past them he turned sharply with—

"What've you got there?"

"A quilt," said O'Rell calmly.

"A quilt! Whose quilt?"

"His own," Blish interrupted, not wholly able to conceal his excitement.

"Not exactly my own," O'Rell put in, annoyed at the interruption. "It belongs to my wife's aunt."

"Does she live in that house?"

"Yes," said Blish hastily. "Mother McCurdy. You've probably heard of Mother McCurdy."

"Shut up, Byron! See here, officer—we got the quilt in Mother McCurdy's; that's what he's trying to tell you. He's—well, he's had a little too much, if you get me. He doesn't quite know what he's telling you."

"Well, how about your wife's aunt?"

"Oh, that was what I was going to tell you," said O'Rell, beginning to realize that the truth was not as plausible as it ought to be. "You see, she lent us this quilt—my wife and me; and we lent it to a man who lives at Mother McCurdy's. My wife's aunt wants to get it back, so my friend and I went in to-night and got it—that's all."

"I suppose, if you just got it," said the policeman, "your friend that borrowed it off you is still awake; so we could go in and let him help you explain."

"I'm afraid we couldn't do that," said O'Rell, "because he's out of town. He lent us the key to his room, so that we could go up and get it. I saw him this afternoon." Blish tried without success to stifle a groan.

"Open up that package!" the policeman commanded sharply. "No foolin' now—let's see what's in it!"

O'Rell shrugged his shoulders and obeyed. The paper fluttered down on the pavement as he spread the quilt wide open, holding it up under his chin, for the policeman's inspection.

"See, officer!" he said cheerfully. "No silver, no jewelry—nothing but a quilt. Now are you satisfied? We're going on to a party, if you're through with us."

"Oh, is that so? I guess you'll go to a party with me first! That place has been robbed once to-night, and we'll take no chances. I'll get my partner to go in and see what they've missed, and in the meantime you two come up to the house with me and talk it over with the lieutenant. Don't move—neither of you!"

O'Rell's conscious mind did not know why he had edged over, during this conversation, to the inside of the pavement, where the stoops of two brownstone houses threw a shallow but black shadow on the sunken areaway between them; but as the policeman stooped to rap the pavement with his night stick and call the man on the next beat to his aid, O'Rell realized what his subconscious self already knew. He mustn't be arrested. It would get into the papers, and a school-teacher couldn't afford the publicity. Worse, the husband of Aunt Cordelia's niece, the wild man from Missouri who was still on probation in the Redman family, couldn't afford to be arrested on his first night alone in New York.

The night stick never touched the pavement. Stretching out the quilt, which he still held by the two upper corners, O'Rell suddenly sprang on the policeman.

Crouching and off his balance, the officer fell over, and the force of the spring drove him into the shadow between the stoops. O'Rell was on him and all around him. The quilt, drawn taut over his face, stifled his shouts to indistinct murmurs. Carried round him by O'Rell's long arms, it pinned the policeman's hands as he reached for his gun. The abandoned night stick fell softly into a corner of the quilt, and rolled, almost noiselessly, off to the asphalt.

For a moment it was an excellent fight. Blish, watching in paralyzed horror, could still appreciate it as a spectacle; but O'Rell meant business. His hand slipped in and drew the revolver from the holster before the policeman could reach it, and a thump from the heavy barrel, on the back of the officer's head, sent him tumbling suddenly into a limp heap.

O'Rell stood up quickly, panting.

"Is he dead?" Blish groaned.

"Shut up!" said O'Rell. "Keep back in the shadow!"

He knelt beside the unconscious policeman and felt of his skull. Then he rose again, trembling but relieved.

"No," he whispered. "He's not even badly hurt. He'll have a lump on his head for a week, and that's about all. Whew! Bad business, Byron! First time I've had a gun in my hand since I came back from France, and I rather forgot where I was for a moment; but it's all right—he isn't hurt. Anybody see us?"

Blish peered out anxiously from behind the stoop.

"Guess not. This is a quiet block—nobody in sight."

"All right! Let's fix this fellow. Stuff his handkerchief into his mouth, Byron. He might come to any moment, and I couldn't hit him again. Now for his hands!"

O'Rell detached the holster and laid it beside the gun. With the policeman's belt, he bound the man's hands securely. Then he fumbled under the blue coat.

"Good luck!" he whispered. "This is one of the wise fellows who make assurance doubly sure. Not only a belt, but suspenders!"

In a moment the suspenders had been lashed about the policeman's feet, and the unconscious man had been laid, with all gentleness, in the deeper shadow beneath the stoop.

"There!" said O'Rell. "Of course he's not tied up very tightly. He'll come to before long, and eventually he'll wriggle out in the light and get himself rescued; but by that time you and I will be at this merry masquerade you speak of. Too bad we haven't any costumes—we may need them; but I don't believe we'll be traced. Now we'll do up this quilt again."

This time he wrapped it up somewhat more carefully, managing at least to cover the fabric with the newspaper. Then he walked calmly out into the street.

"Might as well walk it," he said, as Blish hung back. "It's only a few blocks, isn't it?"

"Yes, but—"

"The chances are we won't be stopped," said O'Rell. "This man wouldn't have done it if he hadn't seen us coming out of Mother McCurdy's. If we take a taxi to

the party, or anywhere near it, we give ourselves away."

"Mark!" Blish's voice was pathetic. "You don't mean to say you're going to cart that quilt around with you? For the love of Pete, leave it here. We might as well go down the street with a brass band."

"I suppose so," O'Rell admitted. "As I remember, in the old days, some of the leather goods stores on Broadway used to stay open pretty late. Run over and see if you can buy a suit case—a two-dollar one will do. I'll wait for you here."

Byron was eager enough to get away from the neighborhood, and he almost ran down the street. O'Rell, with his burden, retired into the shadow of the stoop. Every time footsteps passed his heart stopped beating, but nobody saw him, and the policeman did not stir.

Presently Blish came back, shivering, but carrying a cheap suit case.

"We're in luck!" he panted. "Got there just as they were closing. There, now—crowd it in!"

"Crowd" was the word, for the quilt made the suit case bulge badly; but it locked, and when they walked out into the street they might have been taken for strangers from the country in town overnight.

That, O'Rell reflected, was just what he was; but what a night! He had done things which the principal of the Wynwood High School simply couldn't do. He had overstayed his leave. He had taken part in a game of chance, and won a week's pay in two hours. He had drunk hard red liquor; and finally he had knocked a policeman cold. In short, he had behaved like a riotous, dissolute, and violent man about town.

And the worst of it was that he felt like a man about town. He still had a sense of freedom, a conviction that more adventures were waiting for him here among the skyscrapers. But somewhere down inside of him was a kill-joy conscience that told him that to-morrow he would have to go back to Wynwood, and the butterfly would once more become the caterpillar. He clung to the quilt, not only as the ransom by which he could buy himself off when the family began to ask questions, but as the one connecting link between his two personalities—between the *Mr. Hyde* who beat up policemen and the *Dr. Jekyll* who graded examination papers.

So they marched across town and up-

town to the old assembly hall where the Palette Club, following an artistic tradition of forty years' standing, still held its masquerade. They reached the corner. Down the street they saw the canopy, the lighted entrance, the rows of taxis parked up and down along the curb—and then a policeman, appearing out of nowhere, loomed in front of O'Rell with the familiar—

"What've you got there?"

"A suit case," said O'Rell.

If only Byron would let him do the talking this time! And Byron would. He was crossing the street, walking as fast as he could without actually breaking into a run.

"What's in it?"

"My costume for the masquerade."

"Huh! Open it up, and let's see it!"

There was nothing else to do. The policeman thrust a perfunctory hand down into the suit case, and drew it out again.

"All right! I thought maybe you might be takin' some hooch in with you. Lots of 'em are; and I could stand a nip just now. Guess you'll have more clothes on than most of 'em. If you'd seen what I've seen goin' past in taxis—"

"Wild women?"

"Oh, the women ain't so bad," said the policeman, spinning his night stick as he killed a yawn. "They don't wear much anywhere nowadays; and anyway, most of them are fit to look at. It's the wild men. There was a fellow got out of a taxi just now with nothing on but a tiger skin and sandals. Believe me, if Adam had looked like him, Eve would have never waited to be chased out of that garden. She'd have gone right over the wall. If I was commissioner, this place would be pinched; but I'm not, so go your way."

O'Rell went his way, and walked calmly into the lighted doorway. As he stood at the ticket window, Blish joined him.

"Both for one and one for both," said O'Rell, with a malicious grin.

Blish shook his head.

"Marky, I'd die for you, but I wouldn't die for your wife's aunt's quilt. Now what are you going to do with the thing?"

"I don't know. I can't very well wear it, but—do we have to have masks and costumes?"

"No. The ladies do, God bless 'em; but half the men here will be in plain clothes. They always are."

"Then we'll check the suit case," said O'Rell, "along with our hats."

"And don't lose the check," Blish added; "for if you do, I suppose you'll tear the building down. There—that's done. Now the quilt's off your mind, and we can grasp the fleeting pleasure of the moment till daylight doth appear. And then, Marky, a taxi to my home on fair Long Island—breakfast with my beautiful wife—and a nice dip in the surf to start the day right."

"Better call up your wife," O'Rell warned him, "and tell her I'm coming. Once I brought an unexpected guest home to dinner, and I learned then never to be any man's unexpected guest at breakfast."

"My friends are my wife's friends," said Blish cheerily, "and my guests are her guests. June's in bed long ago, and I wouldn't wake her. Let her learn the glad news when she sees us rolling in. What was it your friend Emerson said—'Trust thyself'? That's us, Marky. We certainly are harping strong on that iron string!"

XV

It was three o'clock in the morning when the magistrate presiding in the Night Court prepared to end a hard evening's work by disposing of the case of Daniel McGarrah, arrested for unlawful entry. The magistrate was a just man, but his first look at Dirty Dan's face suggested to him that the case would be a simple one. Within five minutes the prisoner would be held for the grand jury, and the magistrate would be on his way home; for Dan looked guilty—guilty of almost anything.

The assistant district attorney thought there was no doubt about it. So did Donovan, who was so sure that he hadn't taken the trouble to keep Mother McCurdy and the fat lady in black up till this hour of the morning to give evidence. His own testimony would be sufficient against a man with Dan's record, whose only witness was Al Keeley, with a record of his own. Even Dan's lawyer—a police court shyster hired as a matter of form when it had been discovered that the eminent gentleman who had represented Dan in the old I. W. W. days was out of town for the week-end—thought that his client would have to get bail pretty shortly; though nobody would have suspected it from his brisk determination to see that justice was done.

It is possible that if the reporter who was watching the court for the early edition of the *Evening News* had yielded to his first

impulse, and gone across the street to get something to eat before Dan's case came up, justice would have taken its course; but the reporter chanced to remember Dan's name from the days of the mass meetings in Union Square, and, being conscientious, he waited to see what happened in the hope that it might be worth a couple of sticks for his newspaper.

Now the magistrate, as it happened, was slated for a nomination for the Court of General Sessions that year. It happened, also, that he had heard some prohibition cases earlier in the week, and had dismissed nine-tenths of them because the police had neglected the formality of search warrants. A hard-pressed commissioner, in daily fear of removal by a dry Governor if he failed to enforce the prohibition law, had been provoked into some harsh remarks about the laxity of the courts. The magistrate had answered him with a ringing statement about the constitutional rights of citizens, which had led the day's prohibition story in all the papers, and which, as he estimated, ought to be worth at least ten thousand votes next November. It had turned out pretty well for the magistrate, but it had left some hard feeling between him and the police.

So Donovan told his story, and the State rested its case with the conviction that that would be enough.

"Any corroboration, Mr. Donovan?" asked the magistrate, with some sharpness. "You're not after home-brewers now, you know."

There was no corroboration. The assistant district attorney was scandalized at the idea that any was needed.

"Even a man with a record," said the magistrate solemnly, glancing out of a corner of his eye at the *Evening News* reporter, "has a right to a fair hearing in court."

Dirty Dan's lawyer felt a sudden rising of hope. He put Al on the stand; and though Al's voice was husky, he told a straightforward story, which the assistant district attorney was unable to shake. Whereupon the magistrate delivered some austere remarks to the effect that free citizens would not submit to police oppression, and that it was the duty of the courts to safeguard the rights of the individual against oppressors in high places. After which Dirty Dan was dismissed, with a warning to ring the bell next time he called on friends in a rooming house.

Not even Donovan was so much surprised at this outcome as Dirty Dan; but he wasted no time in thanksgivings. He paid his lawyer, and hurried out into the street, lest somebody should have afterthoughts.

In the street he found Al.

"I stood by you, Dan," said Al eagerly. "I done my best for you, didn't I? Now you know I wouldn't cross you!"

"Sure I know it; but what did you do after they let you go at the station? Did you see Fingerstone?"

"No."

"Then you've still got the pretty babies with you?"

"No. I—you see, Dan—"

And then Al told his story—told it while Dan stood still in the middle of the sidewalk and stared at him with eyes full of wrathful distrust. Al's frank terror, his desperate efforts to convince Dan that he was telling the truth, carried some conviction; and, as Al pointed out, if he had intended to cross Dan, nothing would have been easier than to disappear instead of coming to court to testify for him.

"Huh!" said Dan. "If you'd done that, you'd have been in the morgue before morning. But how about this woman? Told Donovan she'd have you pinched if you came round again—that's nice, ain't it? Even if you're tellin' the truth—even if you did slip the rocks in this quilt, instead of leavin' them in her dressing table drawer—how are we goin' to get in and get 'em?"

"Oh, that's easy. She's gone to the Palette Club dance—won't be home till daylight. We've got plenty of time to work."

"Huh! You mean that we've got to go back and break into that dump again? Yes, break into it this time—you can bet their door's locked now. You're a bird, you are!"

"But, Dan, what else could I do? Donovan was hammerin' on the door. What else—"

"I don't know what else; but I know this—if we go back into that dump, you go first; and if anybody's croaked, you're it. Now we'll go back and look the place over. On the way we'll stop at my room and I'll get a gat. Anybody that tries to stick me up this time will get a bullet through 'em!"

Five minutes later the magistrate came out, lit a cigar on the steps of the court-

house, and strolled down to the coupé waiting for him at the curb. The reporter, emerging from the telephone booth in the lobby, followed him and stopped for a light.

"Good stuff, judge!" he remarked. "I gave 'em a lot of what you told Donovan, and they ought to carry half a column or so in the first edition."

"I'm glad of that," said the magistrate earnestly. "Not that I care for the publicity, but it's time for the police to learn that they can't swear away the liberty of a man they don't like. This is a government of laws, not men, and—who's this?"

Two gentlemen in a great hurry fell out of a taxi that rolled up to the curb.

"Magistrate Axelrod?" said the foremost. "I'm Bullen, of the Department of Justice. You had Dan McGarrahan up here?"

"Yes—what of it?"

"We've been trailing him all afternoon, but we lost him to-night, and we just found out he'd been picked up by the police. Is he on his way to the Tombs?"

"I'm afraid not," said the magistrate gloomily. "Why do you want him?"

"Shipment of diamonds from Russia," said Bullen. "They were coming in to red propagandists here. We were tipped off to the whole thing from Sweden—had it watched from beginning to end—but we didn't want to collar McGarrahan till he'd hunted up his pals. That way, we could get them all at once. Then my man was knocked over by a taxi and lost him. You haven't let him go?"

"Donovan didn't find any diamonds," said the magistrate, with a trace of uneasiness. "Here—come in. We have his address—Donovan verified it. Perhaps you can pick up the trail."

As the three of them started back into the courthouse, the magistrate turned to the reporter.

"This doesn't need to go into the story, does it?"

But the reporter was already on his way to the telephone.

Shortly after that Dan's furnished room was visited in force; but Dan had got his gun, and gone. At that very moment he and Al were sauntering down the street in front of Mother McCurdy's, with an eye open for the patrolman.

"Good and dark!" said Dan. "This is no cinch job, Al. Let's stop in here and get a cup of coffee while I think it over."

They were the only customers in the all-night lunch room. When they had finished their coffee, Dan paused for a moment to borrow a match from the cashier.

"Nice quiet street you've got here," Dan observed. "Business good?"

"Rotten! The street ain't so quiet, at that. Rooming house right across there was robbed twice to-night."

"Twice?" said Al, as Dan glared at him with renewed suspicion.

"Yep—twice. They caught two guys in the halls along about eleven o'clock. I didn't see 'em, but the man on the beat was telling me. Some time after that they find the cop all beat up, tied and gagged, just under the stoop. They brought him in here while they waited for the ambulance, and I heard him say he'd been beamed by a couple of guys that come out of this same house with an armful of loot. Guess he wasn't hurt much, but they sure had laid him out cold."

"So they got an armful of loot, did they?" Dan inquired, with a vicious glance at Al. "The first two wasn't much good, then?"

"Oh, they got caught before they'd had a chance to get anything. Donovan made the collar. Smart dick, that Donovan! But I don't know that the others got so much, at that. The cop said he didn't have a chance to spot anything except an old crazy quilt that one of them had over his shoulder."

"Uh-huh!" said Dan. "Funny thing to take! Did they get 'em?"

"No, those guys got clean away. The cop didn't come to for quite a while. They got away with their quilt. Ha, that's a hot one—with summer comin' on! But likely they had it full of swag."

"Yes," said Dan, "likely they did. Well, come along, Al!"

Al went outside with about as much alacrity as he might have displayed in going back to Joliet.

"I swear to God, Dan, I didn't know—" he began.

"Leave me alone. I got to think."

Al stood trembling while Dan thought, with arms folded.

"Maybe you're tellin' the truth," said Dan at last. "I can't tell now. Because I can't tell, I'll let you live. If you're lyin' to me, I'll get you—to-morrow. Right now the thing is to find that quilt. If you're tellin' the truth, it's likely some

friend of your wife's that's got away with it. Nobody would steal a quilt."

"Nobody would walk out with a quilt when he could put the rocks in his pocket."

"Maybe not; but somebody did walk out with the quilt, and it ain't likely he took the rocks out and laid 'em on the table before he left. You sure your wife went to this dance?"

"She said she was going."

"Sure, she said so! Then she calls up somebody she likes better than her husband, and sends him out to sell this stuff to a fence. Before I'm through I'll probably croak the two of you; but I'll let you go if you stick to me now. First thing is to find your wife. Because it's simpler than breakin' into the house to see if she's there, we'll go to this dance and look for her. If we find her, I'll make her talk. If we don't find her, I'll make you talk. Now where is this dance?"

"I don't know just where. The Palette Club's giving it."

"Well, you find out where."

"I could do it by calling up some people; but they wouldn't like to be waked up. It's getting on toward four o'clock."

"Maybe they wouldn't like to be waked up at five o'clock, to identify your remains in the morgue. You call 'em up, and I'll stand right behind you and listen to your conversation. Then we'll look up this dance. Can we get in?"

"Oh, sure! Anybody with two dollars can get in."

"We don't need a costume, huh?"

"No."

"All right! We'll find this wife of yours, and see what she says when she's lookin' into a gun. If on the way we see anybody with a quilt, we plug him!"

XVI

A HUGE domed hall over which a flood of soft light played in shifting tones—now pink, now green, now blue. A floor crowded with swaying dancers, mostly unmasked by this time, for it was past three in the morning—dancers in every sort of costume, and a good many of them in next to no costume at all, together with a fair sprinkling of men in dinner coats or street dress. The soft shuffle of a thousand feet whispering through the music of the waltz.

Around the room ran a balcony with boxes, half shaded from the lights. Here little parties had gathered to sit out the

dances or to continue flirtations begun on the floor. Cigarettes glowed in the shadows, glasses tinkled, and there were ripples of laughter.

To one of these boxes Mark O'Rell came, alone, with no other purpose than to smoke a cigarette while he caught his breath after a galloping dance with a girl who wore the costume of a golden butterfly, but had the inexhaustible energy of the leaping flea. It was a great dance, and O'Rell had been genuinely sorry when her fiancé came up, with a scowl that he didn't try to conceal, and took her away; but O'Rell had found it rather exhausting.

It wasn't that he was out of training, but—he had to face the truth—he wasn't used to staying up so late. He was beginning to get sleepy, and it was with a vague purpose of finding Blish and persuading him to go home that he had come up to the balcony.

As he looked down at the floor, where the dancers seemed, from above, to be a sort of iridescent fabric rhythmically swaying back and forth, the beauty of the sight caught him and held him, so that presently he sat down and watched the dance through his smoke rings in a sort of rapture. Byron was right—this was the life!

In fact, O'Rell had had a successful evening. Blish had introduced him here and there, but this was a free and easy party in which introductions seemed to be superfluous—especially for a man as big and handsome as Mark O'Rell, and for a man who, though he didn't know it, was so genuinely enjoying himself that he was a tonic for weary pleasure seekers who had come to the ball only from force of habit.

Merely to be one of the crowd was stimulus enough for the principal of the Wynwood High School. It might be true, as everybody told him, that times had changed—that the dance this year was dull by contrast with the good old days; but it was still livelier than anything he had seen at the Wynwood Country Club.

And there was no doubt that he had been a success among the ladies. He had danced to-night with two famous stars whom he had often seen on the film, with the wife of a tenor from the Follies, and with the portly mate of a gentleman worth forty million dollars—not to mention several partners whose charm had not been lessened by the fact that they still wore their masks. Perhaps things weren't what they used to be,

but for Mark O'Rell it had been quite a party.

Still, there had been something lacking. At first he didn't know what it was, and later, as he began to suspect, he put the thought from him. It seemed like ingratitude to the Goddess of Fortune, who had been so good to him to-night; but now, smoking his solitary cigarette up here in the balcony, he knew what was the matter with him. He was lonely without his wife.

This virtuous reflection wasn't altogether welcome. Blish, now, who probably loved his wife, and who evidently dominated her in a way that O'Rell envied—Blish seemed to be getting on well enough without her. Why miss your wife on a night off? But O'Rell did miss Marjorie. There was no getting around it; and he couldn't cure his lonesomeness by the reflection that Marjorie probably wasn't missing him. If he knew Marjorie, at this moment she was sound asleep.

As it happened, he didn't know Marjorie—not yet. At that moment she was curled up in a pile of cushions in a Gloucester hammock, on the wide veranda of the Burbidges' bungalow at the lake. Inside, the others were dancing to the music of a phonograph, but Marjorie was sitting it out—with Mr. Hollingsworth of Boston.

It had been a rather exotic party, for Wynwood. After a couple of hours of bridge the Burbidges had suddenly suggested that they should all drive out to the camp, as they had often done in past summers. Everybody but Marjorie was enthusiastic; and though it came hard, even Marjorie finally gave in. Mark's behavior that morning suggested that he needed a lesson.

So Marjorie, like the others, hurried home to pack up a nightgown and a bathing suit; and Hollingsworth, who had been playing up to her all evening, went with her, and smoked one of Mark's cigars on the porch while Marjorie scribbled an explanatory note and left it on her dressing table. When she came out, she was more vivacious than ever. It hurt her to leave an empty house for Mark, but once her mind was made up she didn't intend to spoil the party.

So they all drove out in the moonlight; and though it was long past midnight when they arrived, the caressing warmth of the night and the shimmer of moonbeams on the lake led somebody to make the gallant suggestion of a moonlight swim.

That, as it turned out, was a mistake. Summer had come on dry land, but not in the water. After ten minutes of desperate swimming to keep warm, they all tumbled out, shivering. Though Zella Burbidge made hot coffee while the others dressed, they took to dancing to get their blood stirring again.

But Marjorie's blood was stirring already. Hollingsworth's admiring attention was the sort of thing she had taken as a matter of course before her engagement; and she was just realizing that nobody had talked to her like that since the day when it was proclaimed to the world that she had found the man of her heart. Plenty of married women in Wynwood flirted, mildly or wildly; but it would never have occurred to anybody to flirt with a girl who was obviously so ideally happy as Marjorie. Hollingsworth, however, was a stranger. He took her as she was, unhampered by the tradition of her marital happiness; and it was pleasant to find that Hollingsworth found her worth flirting with.

Of course, Marjorie was loyal to Mark. Indeed, every time she thought of him tonight her heart beat a little faster; but there was some satisfaction in demonstrating to herself—and to the others—that Mark didn't own her, and that she was entitled to an evening off.

So at that moment when Mark was telling himself that Marjorie was sound asleep she was, as a matter of fact, smiling at Hollingsworth and telling him:

"You know, we really ought to be in there dancing. People will talk."

Hollingsworth heaved a heavy sigh.

"That's the curse of this narrow, small town life," he said. "Simply because you and I happen to meet and to discover a sort of congenital sympathy—I suppose that's what I'd better call it—a sort of mutual understanding—"

"Don't look for any more phrases, my friend. We like each other—better let it go at that."

"It's frightfully bad luck," said Hollingsworth in a shaky voice, "that we have to let it go at that."

"Bad luck? You ought to call it good luck that my husband happened to spend the evening in town. Otherwise you'd be telling all this to somebody else."

"I never would."

"Oh, yes! Zella wouldn't have left you without a partner."

"You know I didn't mean that." He laid his hand over hers. "Little girl, little girl, why didn't I meet you before that other chap?"

"Let's dance the rest of this," said Marjorie, rising; but she let her hand rest in his till they stepped into the light.

O'Rell, in the balcony, was calling himself a fool, unable to enjoy the one night of freedom chance had given him—a fool to worry about a girl who probably wasn't even dreaming about him. Suppose the policeman had got the better of him in their fight? What would Marjorie have thought if he'd been arrested? Probably that he had disgraced the family.

Perhaps he was unfair to her, for he had never seen her in a real crisis; but he thought that whatever happened, Marjorie would remain calm. Yet he couldn't be calm without her.

Once upon a time he had really enjoyed Broadway, but times had changed. Broadway was tasteless without Marjorie; and there didn't seem much hope that he could ever enjoy Broadway with Marjorie, even if Broadway survived prohibition. Dinner and a theater was Marjorie's limit; it didn't seem likely that he could ever entice her to a Palette masquerade. She would think it vulgar, as perhaps it was.

As the music stopped, he went downstairs to find Byron. It was hard to find anybody in that crowd, and more than once girls whom he had danced with earlier in the evening would have turned O'Rell aside; but he wouldn't be turned.

At last he saw Byron across the room, talking to Lorna Lockwood. As it happened, they were talking about him.

"I give you my word, Lorna, three headlines and an ex-duchess begged me for introductions. He's stopped the show. That's the way with these fresh, unspoiled Adonises from the country. What chance have I got with Marky pursued by all the fair ones?"

"I know how you feel," said Lorna. "Did you see my little cousin?"

"Did I see her? My dear! Did I have two dances with her, and beg her for more till a shock battalion of chorus men swept between us? Oh, Lorna! What a figure! She's a bird!"

"All but the glass eye," said Lorna.

"Glass eye? What do you mean, glass eye?"

"Didn't you see it, dancing with her?"

"Not a chance! Cheek to cheek is her style. Lorna, she's a bird—a bird of paradise, a humming bird, a cuckoo—"

"Not all of that—only a chicken; but she seems to be running off with the party. She comes from a small town, too; I don't believe she ever saw a real orgy before. Ran away from the village butcher, or somebody like that. He had a wife, but he preferred to tell his sorrows to Irene. I'm trying to give her a good look around, so the next time she goes into the shop she'll ask for a porterhouse instead of slipping him the languishing glance."

"And here she comes," said Blish. "How she broke away from that gang of wild youngsters I don't know. Now if we only had old Marky with us, we'd be a party; but—there he is, and hung up. Look!"

The wife of forty million dollars, a fat, flabby woman whose face and arms and shoulders were pinker than her satin gown, had intercepted Mark, and was going through the painful formality of introducing him to her husband. O'Rell's stiffness matched the husband's. He who had assaulted a policeman and missed the last train was in no frame of mind to cringe before a mere plutocrat; but the lady compelled them to linger over the ceremony, in the obvious hope that O'Rell would ask her for another dance.

Blish and Lorna turned toward Irene, tripping across the floor toward them, with her scarlet-lined cloak fluttering behind her.

"Oh, Cousin Lorna, I'll have to say good-by. I'm going to breakfast down in a studio in Greenwich Village."

"What? You are not, child. With that wild gang? What would Annie Murphy say to that?"

"Now, Lorna," said Blish. "Remember the old days? We always went down to the Village for breakfast after a Palette dance, and rode home in our costumes on the bus just as honest folk were piling down town to go to work. No harm in it."

"Of course not," said Irene haughtily.

Flushed with heat and excitement, she looked handsomer than ever. Under unaccustomed and overwhelming admiration, she had taken on a sort of lazy insolence that added the final flavor to her beauty. Lorna sighed again as she looked at the glass eye.

"No harm if you know the gang," said

Lorna; "but you don't. Come out and have breakfast with me."

"Where?" said Irene contemptuously.

"Where, indeed?" Blish echoed. "We're in the Dark Ages. Jack's closes at one o'clock. Now listen to me, kind friends. My old college chum is about to rejoin me. He and I are going to take a taxi with our ill-gotten gains of the early evening, and run down to my seaside bungalow at Oceanmere. My beautiful wife meets us with a loving kiss—me with a loving kiss, I mean—and my old college chum with a joyful hug of sisterly affection. Then we all have breakfast and tumble out for a dash in the salty surf. You and the fair Irene come along, and we'll make it a party. Beats anything in the Village!"

Irene seemed to doubt this, and Lorna was frankly skeptical.

"Your wife would be glad to see a party of total strangers in costume coming in with the morning papers, wouldn't she?"

"Say, Lorna, my wife knows who runs the household. My friends are her friends."

"Be that as it may, it's Sunday, and we'd scandalize all your neighbors."

"You don't know them."

"How would we get back, in these clothes?"

"My wife's a good sport. She'll lend you some of hers. Better yet—there's a water carnival at the Mallard Club this afternoon. June will dress you up, and we'll drive over. Little cousin says she wants to meet some movie directors. Well, they'll all be there. And, Lorna, you know this gang. Our little friend will be safe in our moral company."

Lorna apparently saw some merit in this.

"It would be more fun than the Village," she told Irene. "Nice dip in the surf—a chance to see bungalow life on Long Island. Byron, there's something in it—if you'll answer for your wife."

"Oh, I'll answer for her. I always do. Now here comes my little pal—"

Irene let out a startled cry, and pressed her hand on her heart.

"It's him!"

"He, child, he," said Lorna. "But who?"

O'Rell strolled up to the party, intending to ask Lorna for a dance. He didn't recognize the Spanish cavalier, at a distance; but he looked again—at the trunks and hose, at the scarlet doublet, and then, horrified and scandalized, at the glass eye.

"You!" he groaned. "What are you doing here?"

"Ah, hah!" said Lorna. "I see it all."

"You followed me!" cried Irene. "How could you?"

"Yes," said Lorna grimly, "how could you? Irene, is this the man you told me about?"

She nodded.

"But I didn't suppose he'd leave all for my sake," she said.

"All?" said O'Rell. "What's all this about all?"

"Quite so," said Blish. "You've got him wrong, Lorna. All has left him, but she'll be back to-morrow."

"Then you're free?" said Irene.

"Even if he is," said Lorna, "you're not—not while Annie Murphy's cousin is looking out for you. See here, Mr. Mark O'Rell, this child has told me a few things. Now you leave her alone. Can't you see she's only a kid? She's run away from you, doing her best to go straight. She's come to this town to make an honest living. If I can help her, she'll do it; but before she's been here twelve hours you're hot on her trail. Oh, I've seen your kind before! Do as you please with women old enough to like to hear how your wife bores you, but don't rob the cradle."

"Oh, boy!" Blish cried softly. "And this is the model husband!"

In all the diatribe that had fallen on O'Rell's incredulous ears, there was one phrase that rang out over all the rest.

"Who the devil said my wife bores me?" he inquired indignantly.

"Didn't you tell me that," said Irene, "no longer ago than yesterday afternoon?"

"I did not!"

"Why, you"—she hesitated between righteous wrath at the recreant lover and instinctive fear of the high school principal—"you big fibber, you!"

"Don't try to crawl out of it," said Lorna. "She's told me everything. If you don't let her alone, I'll call a cop. This kid is going to have a decent chance. Go home to your wife!"

"I don't know what all this is about," O'Rell sputtered, "except that this looks like a case of truancy. Irene's in my school, and I'm responsible for her. Who said she'd run away from me?"

"Cousin Lorna's got it wrong," Irene sniffled. "She's down on me. I didn't run away from you; but when you told me

to live my own life and make you proud of me, and went so far as to give me to understand that some day—"

"I never did. Girl, you're crazy!"

"What? You come here fresh from—from our first caress, and say I'm crazy?"

"Wow!" yelled Blish. "Boy, page Mrs. O'Rell!"

"Shut up!" said O'Rell. "I don't know what Irene's told you, but let me do a little telling. She's in the senior class of my school, and she's going to flunk. When I broke the news to her yesterday, she took it rather hard, so I tried to cheer her up—"

"Uh!" said Lorna. "They often start that way."

"Well, I didn't start that way. I told her the usual sort of sickening cant that a teacher has to hand out to make his living, but I didn't say anything about some day—or about my wife."

"Yes, but how about this first caress?" asked Lorna.

O'Rell glared at Irene, and she glared back at him with something like his own indignation. Lorna, watching them, began to cheer up.

"That first caress!" replied O'Rell.

"Well, let's forget it."

"Oh, no," said Blish. "Let's hear about it. You've been holding out on us, Marky!"

"I want to get this straight," said Lorna, "if you two sims can get anything straight between you."

"Well, as we were talking, all at once—before I knew it—she leaned over and kissed me. That's all. I didn't do it; she did it."

"That's what Adam said," grunted Lorna.

"Yes, I kissed him!" Irene broke in. "Goodness knows he wasn't the first one, either, but he was the first one that didn't kiss me back. And I know why—he's afraid of that snippy wife of his that goes around with her nose turned up. Well, Mr. Mark O'Rell, you can just go back to her. I may have been led on by your false words, but I see through you now. Out in Wynwood you may have looked like somebody, because there wasn't much to pick from; but I'll have you know that five gentlemen took my telephone number to-night, and there was four more that wanted it, only I didn't like their looks. You can just go back to your wife, for all I care!"

"You ought to be spanked," he told her.

"You both ought to be spanked," said Lorna. "However, it seems that the mystery has been cleared up, and now we can all go home."

"With me," Blish reminded her.

"Wait a minute," said O'Rell. "When one of my pupils runs away before school's out—"

"I thought you said you had graduated," Lorna remarked.

"What if I did?" said Irene. "I'll bet you didn't stick to the truth when you hunted your first job!"

"Did you tell your uncle about this?" asked O'Rell.

"Of course."

"I wonder if you did! Miss Lockwood, don't you think we'd better take her back to Wynwood and talk things over with her uncle? As a teacher, I have some responsibility for her; and I don't think a girl of her age ought to be in a place like this."

He looked about him with the eyes of Wynwood. There was no doubt what Irene's Uncle Jim would think of this dance, or Marjorie's Aunt Cordelia.

"How about you?" said Irene candidly. "I don't suppose you told your wife where you were goin', did you?"

By this time he was able to laugh.

"All right—let's get up a conspiracy. I won't give you away, and you won't give me away. So let's go back to Wynwood and think it over. We'll have plenty of time to catch the six o'clock train."

"You'll never get me back in your old school," said Irene. "Maybe you can go back to Wynwood after seeing some real life, but not me!"

O'Rell was still in his warlike mood—a mood he had never shown in school.

"You little imp, you'll come with me if I have to carry you!"

"Wait a minute," said Lorna. "I don't know your town of Wynwood, but I've lived in places like it. What will the village think if you and Irene roll in at sunrise?"

"Good Heavens!" said O'Rell. "I never thought of that!"

"A word, friends, a word," said Blish pacifically. "Why lose all our tempers? As I was saying before the fracas started, it's getting on toward breakfast time. You've all severely and individually promised to come home with me. Oh, yes, Marky, the ladies have joined the party. Now there's no use letting such a pleasant little gathering break up in a fight. A cool

ride in the bracing morning air; my wife's cheery greeting to put us all in a good humor; a good big breakfast; a dip in the invigorating surf—and maybe I forgot to tell you, but stowed away behind a false ceiling I've got twelve casks of good California port. Under its benign influence we are all once more friends and brothers."

"I was strong for it a while ago," said Lorna; "but now—"

"Oh, this little outburst of ill-feeling will pass away. Friend Irene will promise not to kiss Marky in the taxi."

"Him?" said Irene. "I wouldn't kiss him with a ten-foot pole, now that I've fathomed his true nature!"

"Then there's nothing to keep us from starting."

Lorna shook her head. Then she looked over Blish's shoulder, and frowned.

"What's the matter, blessed damsel?"

"Nothing much. Just saw one of my ex-husbands."

"Not Cousin Al?" said Irene.

"That's the one—and his ugly friend with him. They seem to be looking for somebody."

"Probably for us," said Irene, smiling complacently.

"Probably for us," Lorna agreed. "I've seen enough of Al for the present. He becomes monotonous. Let's go!"

"With me?" said Blish.

"With you," said Lorna. "I'll take the kid home later, maybe; but just now I want some food."

"Grapefruit, oatmeal, bacon and eggs," said Blish.

"Lead me to it," said Lorna.

She took O'Rell's arm as Blish guided Irene toward the door. They stopped at the cloakroom, and O'Rell gathered in the bulging suit case along with his hat.

"Thank Heaven," said Byron solemnly, "the family treasure is safe!"

The girls were too sleepy to ask what he meant, and Lorna never knew that the suit case O'Rell carried contained the antique which she had discovered in Mother McCurdy's wardrobe that evening.

They came out into the blue light of dawn—Blish leading the way, his fat body shaking as he waddled down the steps, but his eyes blinking as fresh as ever behind his glasses; Irene shivering, and drawing her opera cape tighter about her slender black legs; Lorna with the tweed raincoat half concealing her white bloomers, the

pointed cap set rakishly aslant on her golden hair; and, last of all, O'Rell, big and authoritative, with his suit case in his hand.

"Taxi!" yelled Blish.

A driver woke from his slumber, hastily cranked his car, and ran up to them.

"Know the way to Oceanmere, Long Island?"

"The spot where the grass widows grow? Yea, brother—I know it like a book!"

"We're in good company," Blish assured the party. "I can see he's been there. May we find the good wife waiting with a smile as she clips the climbing roses in the dew of dawn. All right, Joe—give her the gas!"

Al had seen Lorna almost at the moment that Lorna had seen Al.

"That's her!" he whispered, catching Dan's arm. "That's her—with the girl in tights, and two men."

"There's two of us," said Dan. "Wait till we get out of the crowd, and I'll make 'em talk! But hurry—we can't lose them."

Just then, however, the music began again, and in the throng of bumping couples they progressed slowly. When they reached the door, the party had disappeared.

"Never mind," said Dan grimly. "They can't lose me to-night."

He sidled up to the taxi starter and slipped a bill into his hand.

"Say, cap, we're going off to a breakfast party, but we've lost our crowd, and I forgot the address. Did you see a tall blonde in a white cap, and a girl in red and black tights, and two men—a big fellow and a little fellow—come out of here just now?"

The starter looked at the bill and answered promptly:

"I sure did. Their taxi just went around the corner. Was the big guy carryin' a suit case?"

"Very likely," said Dan. "That's the bunch. I forgot where they said we were goin'. It was to a guy's house we didn't know."

"Oceanmere, Long Island," said the starter. "Want a car? Likely you can catch 'em; they're in a green taxi trimmed in white."

"Get us a fast one," said Dan. And to Al, in low tones: "Well, what about it?"

"You heard it," said Al bitterly. "You had it right, Dan. She's crossed us both—found the rocks, and sent for somebody she

likes better than her husband. I'll show her, I will!"

"That's the spirit," said Dan. "Too bad you haven't got a gat, but mine will work for two. Nobody ever crossed me twice. Here you are, driver. See this?" He laid a twenty-dollar bill in the chauffeur's hand. "That's over and above the fare," said Dan. "We're going to Oceanmere, Long Island, and we want to catch up with some friends. They're in a green taxi trimmed with white. Just keep 'em in sight as we go through town; but when you get out in the open country, see if we can run up on 'em. We'd like to give 'em a little surprise!"

XVII

A FRESH salty wind swept from Long Island Sound as the green and white taxi sped over the bridge, out from under the canopy of elevated tracks at its farther end, and into the boulevard that led out into the heart of Long Island. Its tang whipped them all into wakefulness. When Blish in his clear, if rather thin tenor, began to sing, they all joined him.

"Kathleen mavourneen, the gray dawn is breaking;
The horn of the hunter is heard on the hill."

"You said it, kid," yelled the chauffeur gayly. "Hark to the hunter's horn!"

From beside his seat a series of barking screeches was spat out into the peaceful morning.

"For the Lord's sake!" yelled Blish, turning around to stare. "Where did you get that thing?"

"Off a Coney Island bus," the driver yelled back over a shoulder. "It clears the way, see? They don't know what's comin'. Watch this milk wagon, now!"

Ahead of them a tired horse was lazily pulling a white-covered wagon homeward toward the barn. The horn barked again; the speedometer spun around from thirty miles to forty-five; and the car shot past a driver frantically sawing on the reins, a horse standing on his hind legs, and a wagon rocking unsteadily in a clatter of empty bottles.

"Easy!" Blish begged him. "We don't want to kill anybody."

"Ah, boy, I don't kill 'em; I miss 'em by an inch. Watch me dust this here truck, now. Out of the way, there!"

Another burst of barking, and they

passed the truck so narrowly that a sheet of paper could hardly have been slipped between the hubs of the two cars. Lorna cocked one black eyebrow at O'Rell.

"Maybe we won't have breakfast with Byron, after all. I've heard there's a good hospital down here at Mineola. If you survive and I don't, tell 'em—"

"Now don't spoil the party," said Blish. "Let's sing something."

"You sing," said Lorna. "I'll wait till they pass out the harp and halo. Looks as if it won't be long now."

But they weren't upset, nor did they upset anybody else, though the driver made a point of honor of dashing frantically at one or two pushcart peddlers whom they overtook, and chasing them to cover on the roadside, while the taxi wheels just shaved their abandoned carts.

"What are they doing out here?" Lorna demanded. "Shouldn't think there'd be much of a market for notions in the Sunday automobile traffic."

"Garden truck," said Blish. "They line up along the roadside and sell it at a quarter the price the stores charge. Mr. and Mrs. Flivver come out for a Sunday ride with the four little Flivverettes, and lay in a whole week's supply of vegetables. I've seen eggs at thirty cents a dozen, if you're looking for bargains."

"Eggs!" yelled the driver. "Oh, Gertrude! Just give me a shot at a pushcart full of eggs!"

O'Rell looked at Blish.

"Is he crazy?" he said in an undertone.

"Ask me," said Byron calmly. "May be a cokey for all I know. Anyway, he's eating up the miles. We'll be there by six o'clock, at this rate."

"Somebody else is eatin' up the miles, too," said Irene, stirring from her huddled repose in the corner seat. "There's a taxi back down the road there that will pass us in a minute. Tell the driver to turn out."

When Byron said something to this effect, the chauffeur looked back over his shoulder, and then shot the car ahead faster than ever.

"Not this morning, boss," he cried cheerfully. "I made a bet with myself nobody would pass me this trip. Watch our dust!"

O'Rell turned and looked back at the other car.

"He's doing his best," he remarked.

As he said it, a cold recollection struck him. He had almost forgotten that earlier

in the evening he had assaulted a policeman. Could his trail have been picked up? It seemed possible, for the other car was gradually making up the distance lost by the first spurt.

"He's gaining on you," O'Rell yelled to the driver. "Five dollars extra if you don't let him catch you!"

"Ouch!" said Byron. "Look at that speedometer, Marky. She's near sixty now. Do you want to kill us?"

"No," said O'Rell. "But—"

"Oh!" said Blish, an idea suddenly striking him. "Say—my gosh, you don't think—"

"I never think before breakfast," said O'Rell; "but I'll just slip our friend five extra if he wins this race—purely as a sporting proposal."

Lorna looked at him suspiciously, but said nothing. Irene was absorbed in the joy of the race. She had turned about and was encouraging the driver, who responded with another explosion of the horn.

"Careful!" Blish shouted. "There's a traffic cop just ahead here, at Jason's Corner. I don't know whether he comes on as early as this, but—"

"Yea, bo—he does. There he is! See him, 'way ahead there, just rollin' his stop-go sign out into the middle of the road? Watch me!"

The car shot forward like a bullet toward the little spot in the roadway where half a dozen houses were clustered about the corner. The spot grew with incredible rapidity, became two spots, and then resolved itself into a blue-clad policeman with a brown campaign hat, standing languidly beside his sign.

Another shriek of the horn, and the car drove straight at the sign. The policeman strode out into the road and held up his hand. Then, as the taxi rushed at him, he suddenly leaped aside, fell sprawling, and rolled over to safety as his sign was knocked down and run over, bent into a shapeless mass. The car, rocking madly, righted itself, and a moment later skidded round the corner and into the great empty expanse of the Merrick Road. All four of the passengers relaxed slowly and looked at one another with eyes still wide with terror.

"I'll give you ten dollars," Blish yelled to the driver, "if you'll promise not to do that again!"

"Take back your gold! I told you we're in a hurry."

"Cokey is the word," Blish muttered dolefully. "Well, it's only twelve miles more."

Behind them the traffic policeman sat up in a cloud of dust, then climbed slowly to his feet. In front of the candy, cigar, and stationery store on the corner a bald man in blue suspenders, who had just rolled down the awning, stood with hands on his hips and laughed uproariously.

"Yes, laugh," snarled the policeman. "Brand-new sign I only got Friday, and here it's no more good than a last year's license plate. Did you get his number?"

"Me?" said the storekeeper. "Why should I get his number? I thought that was why you got down on the ground, so you could get a good look at it."

"Think you're funny, don't you? Best stop-go sign we ever had at this corner. I'll fix 'em!"

"You'll have a chance to fix somebody else in a minute," said the storekeeper, looking down the road. "Here comes another taxi hell bent for leather. Look out, Jim—you'll get your pants dusted again!"

"Not this time," Jim vowed. "Here—gimme a hand with them packin' cases. Hustle, now! I'll pay ye if he does 'em any damage. They ain't goin' to spend all day Sunday runnin' over me and my signs!"

The other car was approaching the corner at terrific speed, but Jim and the storekeeper managed to roll out the two empty packing cases into the middle of the road before it was on them. Then the policeman stood back and drew his revolver as the taxi came on.

This driver was of no such heroic stuff as the other. He slowed down. One of his passengers leaned forward with outstretched arm, apparently pointing out a way around the obstruction; but the driver shook his head. He owned his own car.

Straight in the path that flanked the packing cases on one side was the corner fire plug, while in the other stood the policeman and his gun. The taxi stopped.

"What's the matter here?" said the man who had pointed—an unshaven man in a baggy blue serge suit, with a cloth cap pulled down over his eyes. "Detour?"

"Detour nothing!" said the policeman grimly. "You're under arrest for exceedin' the speed limit."

"Don't kid us," said Dirty Dan. "How do you know what time we were makin'?" I'll swear it wasn't over fifteen miles."

"See that dead tree down the road? I time 'em from there. It's two hundred yards, and you done it in seven seconds. I'll teach you New York fellers you can't come down here and run over my sign—and on Sunday, too!"

"Sign?" said Dan. "I didn't see any sign."

"The feller just ahead of you saw it, all right. He run right at it. Look at it now!" The policeman waved a hand toward the bent piece of iron by the roadside. "I'll show you!"

"Huh!" said Dan. "I suppose the fellow just ahead of us was in more or less of a hurry, then."

"Yes, sir, just about as much of a hurry as you; but you'll have time to cool off while you wait for the judge."

"H-m!" said Dan. "What's the charge for speeding out here? About twenty-five, maybe. Well, suppose I pay it to you, and then we can go along."

"Don't you try that! I'll add the charge of tryin' to bribe an officer, if you say another word. You fellers that come down here from town and think we got no rights just because we live in the country! Here—hands up!"

Dan's movement toward his pocket had barely started when he found himself looking into the muzzle of the policeman's revolver. There was only one thing to do. His hands went up.

"Go through his pockets, Oscar," the policeman commanded.

The storekeeper, obeying literally, brought out a package of cigarettes, a box of matches, a time table, a deck of cards, and finally a squat black automatic.

"Uh! I thought so. Now that fellow in the taxi—and the driver, too."

"Don't get excited, brother," said Dan. "I was only reaching for a cigarette. I pack that gun because I was stuck up a week before last. Where's this judge you speak of?"

"He lives in that white house down the road."

"Then lead us to him," said Dan. "We'll 'fess up and pay what we owe. As I said, we're in a hurry."

"And as I said," the policeman countered triumphantly, "you'll set down and cool off. The judge never hears any cases till after church. Now come along with me—all three of you. We only got two hundred and ten dollars last Sunday, but I guess

we'll make it up before you're on your way again."

The taxi was run up and parked in front of the store, and Dan, Al, and the disgruntled driver marched off in front of the policeman, who shepherded them with his covering revolver.

"Looks bad," Al whispered. "I've only got about twenty-five bucks. How're you fixed?"

"I've got something over fifty; but they won't stop us this trip, Al. If this hick justice cleans us out, we'll get to Oceanmere just the same. I'll find this quilt if I have to walk; and if I walk, you'll walk with me!"

VIII

LUCKILY O'Rell's taxi met no one on the Merrick Road. Four hours later that road would be one long black column of automobiles taking pleasure seekers to the beaches, but at sunrise it was empty. They flashed along it for three or four miles, and then turned sharply off to the right on a glassy black boulevard that led across wide green reaches of salt marsh. The wind freshened, and the tang of salt grew stronger.

"Nearly home," said Blish cheerily.

"And may there be no moaning at the bar," said Lorna.

The car drove on at the same breakneck speed. O'Rell leaned back and wondered how Marjorie would spend the morning. He knew what she would do, of course—breakfast, then a swim, and a ride back to town after lunch; but what would she think about?

She had said something about a friend of Howard's, who was going to be her partner at the bridge party. O'Rell experienced a sudden desire to know more about this person. Marjorie was loyal, of course; but he knew she must have felt, as he had felt, the slow growth of the unspoken antagonism between them in the last few weeks. They loved each other, but this went deeper than love; it went down to fundamental tendencies of their temperaments.

It had almost flared out on Friday night, when they discussed Mark's trip into town; and that Marjorie's reaction after that discussion had been something like his own, he guessed from her running off to the lake with the Burbidges. Six months ago nothing could have enticed her to do that on a night when he would expect to find her

waiting for him; but six months ago nothing would have enticed him to spend a night in New York without her. Time was doing its work, he concluded. Given a chance, she had—as Byron phrased it—gone with her gang.

But he, unfortunately, hadn't gone with his gang. He looked at his companions sulkily, and with a disapproving eye. Old Byron, of course, was well enough; but he hadn't grown up, would never grow up. Lorna Lockwood seemed to fall in readily enough with any schemes for amusement, but he surmised that she wasn't amused. She went with the crowd from force of habit. And there was Irene—

He still had a sense of responsibility for Irene. After all, she was his pupil, and he couldn't let her drift into the whirlpool of Broadway life. She was a nuisance—an incredible nuisance. He knew that if he tried to restrain her, to do anything for her, she would make a scene; and her scenes were more scenic than he could ever have imagined in the days when he had been trying to pound trigonometry into her head.

He didn't know what he could do with her, or for her, but he couldn't simply let her go. She was one of the responsibilities of his job. What a relief to see the last of her, if he could be sure she was safe!

He realized, indeed, that it was probably his anger with Irene that led him to look on Lorna and Byron with growing distaste; but whatever the reason, he wouldn't be sorry to see the last of them, either. He hadn't gone with his gang. Now that he could think it over, in the clear sunlight and the cool breeze of early morning, he realized that Marjorie was his gang.

Marjorie had taken him into Wynwood. He had endured a year of Wynwood for her sake. He could endure a lifetime of Wynwood, if he had to, so long as all went well between him and Marjorie; but all wasn't going well, by a good deal.

The old antagonism would reappear when they both went back home, even if she were satisfied with his explanation of his absence. Indeed, he was beginning to think that it would be a more ominous sign if she asked for no explanations. Now that the honeymoon was over, was he more to her than a habit and a duty?

It would be a relief, perhaps, to spend a soothing hour or two in another household—a household which seemed to run smoothly just where his was beginning to jar.

Byron had his faults, but he was a good fellow, and his wife must be another. O'Rell didn't have much confidence in Blish's theory that by observation of his home life O'Rell could learn how it was done; but at any rate it would be pleasant to spend the morning in an atmosphere of good fellowship and calm affection. It would give him a badly needed rest before he went home again to Marjorie—and Aunt Cordelia.

Blish broke into his musings with a gleeful shout.

"Five minutes more, friends! That's Oceanmeré—no, there—across the inlet."

Far ahead of them a cluster of red roofs rose between the green meadows and the gray sky, with a black water tower above them.

"That's the place," said Byron. "The tired business man's paradise—the best beach on the South Shore—the place where they fry the best breakfast bacon in captivity. Hump 'er, Joe; only muffle that horn. Some of my neighbors like to sleep late."

"Don't hump her too much!" Lorna shrieked. "Look there—down the side road."

Across the marshes, jogging slowly on toward the crossroads ahead of them, came a covered wagon pulled by one lackadaisical horse. It was painted a fiery red, and the canvas cover shone in the red rays of the morning sun.

"Watch me knock the paint off him!" yelled the chauffeur. "Hey, there, Silas! Gangway!"

The horn barked its hideous warning, but the horse came on at the same plodding pace. The two vehicles seemed likely to reach the crossroads together.

"Look out!" Blish yelled. "That fellow must be deaf!"

"He can't be too deaf to hear this," the chauffeur replied, as the horn shrieked again.

If he heard, the driver of the wagon paid no attention. Fascinated, they all stared at this strange vehicle which seemed so careless of flying taxis, so certain that it had the right of way. Something was painted on the cover—painted in large white letters that gradually became legible as the taxi flew on. Lorna's eyes were best, and she spelled it out slowly, at first in a labored undertone, then in a sudden shriek:

"E, x, p—explosives!"

The wagon was at the crossroads. The driver, amazed at the recklessness of the chauffeur who dared to drive so frantically down on him, waved an arm and shouted, then leaned suddenly back and tugged on the reins. O'Rell and Lorna stood up in the taxi, shouting. Blish was jolted out of his seat and tumbled upon the floor as the car bumped over a hole in the road. Irene, losing her head completely, leaned over and clutched at the chauffeur's shoulders.

The car swerved, bounced over a gutter beside the road, plunged into the crossing—and neatly cut the hind wheels out from under the wagon, just before the taxi went down in a deeper ditch and flung its passengers forward and out into the grassy meadow beyond.

(To be continued in the January number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

IN LOVE

I NOTICE to-night that the moon hangs low,
Caught there in a branch of my maple tree.
I'll climb up and get it—my love, I know,
Would think it a beautiful gift from me!

And if you should happen to find the sea
Is missing to-night from its wonted place,
You'll know that I took it impulsively,
To coax a swift smile to my lady's face!

The stars I will gather for her to wear;
The end of the rainbow is somewhere curled;
I'll find it and take it to wreath her hair,
And then I will lay at her feet—the world!

Charlotte Mish

The Forge

IT IS THE PRESSURE OF HEAVY BLOWS THAT UNITES CLEAN
METAL

By Robert Terry Shannon

THE wasted figure of the girl on the bed raised itself with a start of nervous energy. The slight rustle of the bedclothes was lost in the steady drumming of rain on the slanting roof of the cabin.

Between her and the kerosene lamp the man who was reading in the thick legal volume was so much absorbed in his studies that not even the deafening claps of thunder or the dazzle of forked lightning caused him to look up from his pages.

"Cleve!"

The quick, nervous whisper of his name brought him out of his chair with a startled, whirling movement. At his full height he was near six feet—a wide-chested man with the flatness of back, waist, and hips that belonged to his long-muscled breed. Swiftly, without words, he dropped upon the edge of the bed and took the trembling hands of Sabina Hammett, his sister, into his calloused palms. From under thick, sandy brows that were already growing bristly—although he was only thirty—dense blue eyes searched the face of the invalid with apprehensive curiosity.

"Cleve, just now, when the lightning flashed, I saw something—a man—coming around the corner of the forge." A shiver trembled through the girl's shoulders. Her voice sank to a whisper. "Cleve, it was horrible!"

A slow smile, infinitely comforting in the past, grew on Cleve Hammett's lips.

"I reckon, Sabina, you've been dreaming, an' a pop of thunder woke you up and frightened you."

The bright eyes of the girl were fixed on the blackness of the window pane.

"I—I—there couldn't be anybody out prowlin' around on a night like this, could there, Cleve?"

Gently he lowered her back to the pillow. "Of course not. Go back to sleep now, an' pretty soon I'll put out the light an' go on off to bed."

The girl's eyelids fluttered. "It's such a comfort to have you settin' up in here!"

The thunder ripped through the night, peal after peal of sundering tumult. A crackling musketry of electrical explosion streaked across the rain-driven clouds. A flickering glare of white lightning sustained its incandescent brilliance for the space between two ticks of the mantel clock.

"Sabina!"

It was a cautious whisper from Cleve. His sister's eyes, sleepless and glistening, opened suddenly.

"Yes, Cleve?"

"Don't get yourself excited, honey, but just now I saw it, too. A man sort of huddled up like he was deformed—he swung open the door of the forge an' went inside. You lay right calm, an' I'm goin' out an' see what it is."

Like white fluttering flowers, Sabina Hammett's hands ran up and down her brother's sleeves.

"Oh, don't—don't—don't! Don't leave me, Cleve—please! Listen! I got a feeling—a presentiment—"

Firmly but carefully he freed himself.

"It 'll only take a minute, honey. I'm not going to get hurt, an' I ain't goin' to hurt anybody, but I can't have people sneakin' around the place that way."

Turning up the collar of his coat, he moved toward the door.

"I'm low in the body to-night, Cleve"—her voice was oddly distant—"but my mind's strummin' with all kinds of things, like wires in a wind. I get a message that keeps beatin' through that you'll regret it. Let him go! Leave him alone!"

"Don't talk like that, Sabina. You're half asleep."

The lean jaw set with the stubbornness that was a part of Cleve Hammett. His father, who had run the forge, who had been the blacksmith and wheelwright here in the depths of the Ozarks, had been a stubborn man; and before Matthew, the father, old Samuel Hammett, the grandfather, working at the same anvil, had been a stubborn man. No will or word of woman had bent a Hammett in three generations, at least.

Sabina, white about the mouth, nodded in resignation.

"I'll keep my eyes on the clock, an' if you ain't back in three minutes—no, four minutes—I'm comin' out to get you," she said fixedly.

Without answering, Cleve slipped out into the gusty night. As the door closed, the girl let herself off the bed and got her feet into shoes. She crossed the room and reached out of a closet her long cloth coat, which had been so ample before her superb natural strength had begun to be consumed by the mysterious "misery."

Somehow, to-night, her excitement seemed to buoy her up. Nevertheless, she was cautious. She sat down in the chair that Cleve had vacated. The doctor had warned her frankly that her heart might stop suddenly. What was needed was an expert operation in one of the big city hospitals—at a price her brother could not pay.

Two minutes passed, and the girl's lips began to move.

"Oh, God, let thy mantle protect him, if this danger be real," she prayed fervently.

Three minutes!

As she rose to her feet, Cleve pushed through the door and came into the room with the sagging form of a rain-soaked man in his arms.

"Clean collapsed when I found him on the floor. Limp as a rag!"

Hatless, with wet hair plastered down tight to his scalp, the stranger's face was a pasty white. As Cleve placed him in a rocker, a quick pressure was necessary to arrest a crumpling slide to the floor.

"You get back to bed, Sabina. You ain't able—"

"I won't. You want the brandy bottle, Cleve?"

"Yes—hand it to me."

Cleve Hammett's voice froze to silence. Sabina caught the amazement in his eyes,

and followed his glance downward. The hands of the derelict, lying close together in his sodden lap, were puffed, mottled with angry blue and purple spots on tight, glistering skin, until they bore scant resemblance to human members.

"Looks like snake bite, Sabina, or—"

At the same instant brother and sister caught sight of the explanation—a short six inches of polished steel chain. The angry ridges of flesh at the wrists told the rest, marking the circle of handcuffs that were half sunk in the burning skin.

II

"THEY were the kind," said Cleve, as he picked up the faintly clinking metal, "that got tighter the more he struggled."

A hacksaw lay on the table. It had been a delicate job to bite through the hardened metal and spare the crowding flesh, but with the aid of a knife blade worked under the gyves, it had been accomplished.

"Young, an' from the city, I judge," Cleve remarked. "Well, we'll soon find out. Where's that brandy?"

Under the fiery stuff forced through his lips, a tinge of color came back to the man's cheeks. Without warning, he pitched forward in the chair. Jointly, Cleve and Sabina supported him.

"Oh, my God! I've suffered enough. Why didn't you let me stay dead?"

Cleve forced more liquor upon him. This time it was gulped eagerly.

"I'll fix a pan of hot water directly, an' you can soak your hands," Cleve remarked quietly. "You, Sabina, go out of the room."

The girl shook her head.

"Well, fix the hot water, then," her brother said shortly. "Now, sir, you may as well get into some dry clothes."

The merest wisp of a smile showed on the quivering lips.

"When I was a kid, I heard the fable about the good Samaritan, but I always thought it was a joke before. Brother, you're lookin' at a man that's been through hell!"

But for his eyes, which were set too closely, the stranger's face might have passed as handsome, with allowances made for the lack of a shave and for the marks of pain and exposure which had not, as yet, begun to fade. Clad in a clean blue shirt of Cleve's, and a pair of old, carefully mended trousers that were much too large, he thrust

his feet, in loose carpet slippers, toward the fire in the grate.

"That stuff warms me up, folks." His head leaned back, and the lids closed down over his eyes. "Yes, thank God, it's over now. Three days hidin' like an animal with those damned things torturin' my wrists!" Suddenly he opened his eyes and looked squarely at Cleve Hammett. "What you aimin' to do with me, brother? Turn me over to the cops?"

"Not necessarily," Cleve remarked. "It depends."

"On what?"

"On what made 'em put those things on you, for one thing."

"Oh, I'm guilty, all right! I'm not fool enough to try to work any sympathy gag on you. Only, as a fair proposition—wouldn't you say I've already suffered two thousand dollars' worth?"

Cleve turned sharply to Sabina, who was sitting within three feet of the speaker.

"I don't like to keep harpin' on it," he shot out at her, "but it seems to me that you ought to get out of this room. You can go up an' sleep in my bed."

"I reckon," she replied slowly, "that he ain't so poison that his conversation 'll hurt me any." Her eyes searched the haggard face of the younger man with a steadiness that ignored her brother. "I've had pain myself till I thought I'd die, an' hoped I would."

The fugitive met her gaze for a moment, and then returned to the laving of his swollen hands in the basin of hot water that he held in his lap.

"They caught me in New Orleans, and was bringin' me back when I jumped off the train somewhere in this God-forsaken wilderness," he said drearily. "My body's been like ice to the bone, except my wrists. They've been afire—yes, actually burnin', like them steel cuffs was heated red-hot. I was scared to ask anybody for food. I had to keep hid out. The pain got so bad that it humped me over, an' I got along all doubled up, like nothin' human's got a right to be. My hands, I thought they was goin' to rot at the wrists an' fall off. If I'd come to a river, I'd have drowned myself. You see"—he raised his eyes to meet the intent gaze of Sabina—"I was all in, I'm still all in, or I wouldn't be talkin' this way to strangers."

The girl's hands were tightly clenched in her lap.

"It was worth two thousand dollars," she said quietly. "Whatever it was you done, you've paid for it. You won't have to pay again."

"I don't know about that," Cleve Hammett said. "The law don't contemplate making a man suffer without just cause. It was his own fault that he tried to get away."

"I'm through." The voice of their strange guest was utterly nerveless. Exhaustion, plainly, was following the temporary stimulation of the liquor. "Just let me sleep, folks, an' you can do what you please with me in the mornin'. Just another underpaid bank teller, with his measly little wad of boodle hid out safe an' snug. They'll never think to look—"

He sank into the overpowering grasp of sleep.

III

In the middle of the night Cleve's slumber was disturbed by the moaning of Sabina. Presently he became wide awake. It was no new thing, this audible suffering of the girl; nor was it the mere nagging plaint of a querulous nature. To-night it seemed that there was a more strained note in the half muffled murmurings from the parlor below, which housed Sabina's high-bolstered bed.

"I can't stand this any longer," Cleve muttered, as he reached out for his clothes. "She'd lay there an' die before she'd call me or send for a doctor!"

In the hallway at the head of the stairs he stopped for a moment, to push open the door of the little low-pitched room wherein he had carried the spent fugitive. The man was an inconsequential, motionless outline under the quilt that Cleve had thrown over him. On a chair that stood beside the bed were the clothes he had first worn, soaked and shapeless.

Pallid, strained, Sabina's face showed dimly in the light of the candle that Cleve carried. Even in the poor light, her eyes were intensely luminous.

"You're worse to-night than you've ever been," he said, sitting on the edge of her bed and taking one of her fragile hands. "It's the excitement—that little rat of a sneak thief!"

"Maybe he isn't so bad," she said. "Maybe there's something fine in him."

Cleve passed an anxious hand over her forehead.

"Nonsense! He's just a floating bit of scum that attracted your sympathy. I could see that from the first. Sabina, you've got a little fever. Don't you think I'd better saddle up and go after Doc Vance? I can have him here in a half hour."

"I won't have you spendin' any more money on me," she said firmly. "We're too deep in debt as it is; an' besides, it don't do any good. You're goin' to need every dollar when you give up the forge an' hang out your law shingle. About that man, Cleve—you ain't goin' to give him up to the sheriff?"

Cleve's lips tightened.

"If there's anything that's contemptible in the sight of the Lord, it's a thief," he said grimly. "They all ought to be exterminated, like vermin."

"Will you let him go free in the mornin', Cleve?"

He studied the thin, eager face, becoming conscious of the fact that by her very weakness she was overcoming his domination. An acute, twisting pain tore in his breast at the sight of her helplessness. The ravages of illness had left little more than a trace of the beauty that had once belonged to her.

The fact that he had tried to keep buried in the back part of his mind assailed him, all at once, with irresistible force. Sabina was dying. It was no longer a question of years, but of months. Doc Vance knew it, too. Indeed, he had baldly said as much to Cleve.

What she needed was specialists, X rays, the protracted and skillful care that only some great hospital could furnish. Even then, Doc Vance's honesty had prevented him from being definite in any promise of recovery.

The thought that he was to blame for the lack of money abruptly took specific form in Cleve's mind. He had loafed along with the forge, managing to keep barely alive while he laboriously pursued his ambition to gain a self-taught mastery of law. The blacksmith's trade was going out; there was no more money in it. If he had opened a garage on the State highway, only two miles away, he might have—

From some mysterious depths of his nature a sob rose up in his throat, audible and uncontrollable. In all his adult life it was the first time he had ever given way to emotion.

"Cleve!" Sabina's lips struggled with a smile. "Cleve, quit your worryin'. There's nothin' you can do; and besides, the pain has stopped. I ain't in misery at all. You go on upstairs an' get your sleep."

It was true—there was nothing he could do; nothing Doc Vance could do, either. The only thing that he could do to relieve either himself or Sabina was to leave the room.

IV

MONEY! As Cleve Hammett ascended the stairs, the word kept ringing in his ears. With money Sabina could have her chance at life. Money! He found that he was repeating the word aloud:

"Money!"

The voice was coming like a prompting from his subconscious self. Pausing with his hand on the rail, he tried to get at the meaning that struggled to clarify itself. Deep in some hidden chamber, obscured from his thinking brain, something was germinating—something that had to do with some seed already planted.

The money, of course, would be entirely for Sabina. It was the only thing on earth that would give her the chance to live; but it would take a good deal. Two thousand dollars wouldn't be a penny too much.

He was startled to find that his face was wet with a cold perspiration, and that there was a watery sensation in his veins. The thief who was now under the Hammett roof had stolen exactly two thousand dollars. Furthermore, it was hidden away safe and snug, the fugitive had said, where they would never think to look—to be squandered, later on, for the profligate pleasures of a weedy, sniveling speculator!

With a pounding heart, Cleve continued slowly to the top of the stairs. Methodically his mind, with its legal, deductive bent, began to arrange his thoughts. A thousand mental feelers, like antennæ, began to sense a conclusion. The man above had two thousand dollars concealed *upon his person!*

From below came an almost indistinguishable sound—a repressed murmur of bodily anguish. Once more the frigid moisture began to gather like dew on the corrugated brow of Cleve Hammett.

In the sense of one impulse conflicting against another, there was no struggle in the man's being. All his reactions were physical, were marked by only the surge of

suddenly heated blood in his veins, the bewildering waves of heat and cold that flowed over his body. The element of mind that had to do with moral distinction was now totally dormant. His Calvinistic heritage was obliterated in something rooted far back in the human instinct that translates sympathy into action.

In the whole span of Cleve Hammett's consciousness there were just two dominant peaks of certainty. One was that Sabina was in agony, was dying, for the lack of two thousand dollars. The other was that he was going to get that amount.

The sleeping man remained as he was, sunk far beyond any immediate awakening. Stepping lightly with a measure of animal cunning, which also was an instinct rather than a design, Cleve lifted first one sodden garment and then another from the chair.

A swift precautionary glance at the prone figure had assured him that in any event he had all the advantage. With a flash of prescience, he rehearsed what would happen in the case of a struggle. Superior in position, size, and strength, he could crush, could strangle, the man on the bed to swift and final extinction.

Cleve had left the candle in the hall, and by its faint rays he could see that the money he had extracted from one of the trouser pockets was inconsequential—less than fifty dollars. He restored it impatiently. The vest, upon the most minute examination, yielded nothing. Cleve rubbed the cloth of it between his fingers. There was nothing sewn in the lining.

It came to him that the money might be in a belt around the man's waist, or possibly in a small bag suspended from his throat, beneath his undershirt.

As he picked up the coat, his head was filling with the foreshadowing dizziness of the merciless attack. Already his muscles were tightening. Then, between his fingers, he detected a thickness of something about as plump as an almanac.

Near the candle, he reversed the coat. The place of concealment had been artfully planned. High, between the shoulders, was a flat pocket crudely but serviceably made in the lining. Where the smooth inside cloth joined the inner extension of the rough outside fabric, the flap of the pocket was closed inconspicuously with metal snap fasteners in a tight, straight line.

At the moment of opening the pocket and extracting the damp packet of bank

notes, Cleve Hammett was perfectly cool. Negligently he restored the coat to its place. Under the light on the table in his room, he counted the money carefully. There were twenty one-hundred-dollar bills.

V

WITH the tangible means of Sabina's hoped-for recovery in his hands, Cleve began to consolidate into his former self. The calm, reasoning mind that had been overpowered in the engulfing primordial uprising of emotion began to work again.

The fleeing teller, Cleve imagined, had foreseen the possibility of capture. It was probable that his flight had been accomplished with his own funds, honestly earned. As easily as if he had been in the man's own shoes, Cleve was able to construct a line of reasoning which must have been, he felt, identical with that pursued by the fugitive.

Half expecting capture, he had prepared for it. By virtue of good luck, he might have hoped for a comparatively light prison sentence. In the city jail, before being taken to the penitentiary, he could have sent out and bought a cheap suit of clothes, putting the new garments on in exchange for the old ones. Then, with the money still concealed in his original coat, he could have made the discarded clothing into a bundle and sent it to the home of some friend, to be held for him until his term was served.

In the event of arrest, he could easily explain the absence of the stolen money. Cleve had heard that New Orleans, where he was arrested, was a great horse racing town. A man could easily lose two thousand dollars on the races, and there wouldn't be any record to show for the transaction. Of course, if he eluded capture, the money was still safe and easy of access at any time.

"Smart, like all of those fellows are, but cunning and mean. Probably took advantage of somebody in the bank that was trusting him. Didn't have the stamina to earn the money—"

A crashing sense of the reality of his own situation burst upon Cleve like a shell. It came so unexpectedly—the realization that he, Cleve Hammett, was a thief—that he became giddy, became nauseated in the pit of his stomach.

In a moment of terrific strain, he had reverted to the primitive man in morals and

ethics. In a sudden illuminating flash, he saw that equally strong was the veneer, the grafted-on code, of the civilized member of society. A grafted limb becomes an integral part of the parent trunk.

His hand shook as if it was palsied, but he managed, nevertheless, to find the bottle of brandy, which he had brought upstairs, and to hold it to his lips until he had drained the last drop of its contents.

Throwing himself across the bed with his clothes on, Cleve fell almost immediately into a torpid, dreamless sleep, during which his reeking breath came in long, heavy rattlings.

When he awoke, the room was flooded with sunshine. Consciousness came back slowly, accompanied by the inevitable stiffness in the mouth, the widening pains in the head.

The door of his room was closed. Gradually he became aware that pinned in the center of the door was a sheet of white paper. As he arose on weak legs, he fancied that it must be near noon. The paper trembled in his hand for a moment before he could focus his eyes to read the penciled scrawl.

DEAR FRIEND:

I woke up early, and as I laid there, thinking it all over, I come to a decision that I know you must approve. There's nothing to it to be crooked. It don't pay, never did, and never will.

Maybe it was because I had such a hell of a time that I lost my nerve, but I don't think that's it. It's something else, I think. Maybe it was some little thing your sister said last night. She's a peach, even if she is about all in herself.

Mister, I'm going straight. This was the first time I ever slipped, and it 'll be the last. Too much money passing through my hands—that was my temptation and my downfall. I'm going back of my own free will. I think I can square it with the bank president, and he'll plug for me in court. He's a good guy.

I'm going out West to start again all over. It's a hundred to one I come out of it without the convict stripes, on account of what I've suffered already. As for the money I took, they'll get it back, every cent, and that's what tells the tale. I got it hid out, and I'll walk right in and plank it down on the old man's desk. You can't get away from that kind of an argument that a guy's on the level. Maybe you won't turn me over to the cops, but I can't afford to take the risk. That's why I'm taking an early sneak.

My regards to your sister. God bless you both!

Yours truly,

A FRIEND.

For a moment Cleve Hammett reeled on his feet. The inescapable point, as he real-

ized in a paroxysm of anguish, was that he had condemned the man, whoever he was, to certain damnation. The money—

It was still clutched in his hand, a soiled, crumpled mass of green paper. In the darkness of early morning the bank teller had not seen it as he pinned the note on the door; and it was evident that he had not suspected the removal of the stuff from its secret pocket.

Sabina—he must tell Sabina. He would confess everything to her. She wouldn't understand, and in all probability she would never forgive him; yet she must be told. Together, they would try to find means to overtake the fellow.

No, it was hopeless. They knew neither his name, nor the name of the bank, nor the city he came from. There was an early train which he could have caught. The man was rushing to a second hell—and he didn't know it!

Cleve Hammett opened the door to the parlor. From windows on three sides the sun poured in, gilding every smooth surface of the worn old furniture. The cut glass vase on the immaculate cloth of a center table shone like an iridescent burst of rainbow colors.

Slowly Cleve nerved himself for the awful ordeal of telling Sabina. She was still in bed. As his eyes traveled from the footboard upward, her form lay as slender, as chaste, as if it was no more than a child's. The radiance of the sun was full upon her countenance. She looked, he thought, like a saint—calmly beautiful, serene, plaster white.

Some inward calmness from a hitherto untouched source rose up to steady him. He saw, at once, that Sabina had died during the night.

VI

NEIGHBORS, kindly and solicitous, came with ready willingness to take charge of all details. The house became unbearable, with the pitiless destruction of privacy that death brings. The unfamiliar scent of flowers, the hushed voices, drove Cleve outside and into the forge.

There was a job of welding that needed doing, and he got up a fire. With an overhead pulling of his right arm he speedily had the great blast of forced air hurricaning into the coals. The ends of the iron changed from cherry red to flickering whiteness. With his tongs he lifted the metal

upon the anvil. He saw that all parts of it were clean. With mighty ringing blows he was soon uniting the twin pieces. The old formula that his father had so often repeated came back to him:

"You git yore metal white-hot, an' make sure it's clean. Then it's the pressure of heavy blows that unites it."

An old man with a white beard came out and put a hand on Cleve's arm.

"I reckon that job 'll wait till arter she's buried, Cleve," he said in a rusty voice.

Cleve looked at the speaker with dull, uncomprehending eyes.

"I reckon Sabina wouldn't object to me doin' this," he said. "Beyond any question of a quibble or a doubt, it's a perfectly honest thing to do."

The neighbors, after a time, gave up trying to be of service to Cleve Hammett. Throughout the winter the peculiarity of behavior that was observed for the first time on the day of Sabina's death became more marked. For one thing, he would not charge for the work that he did at the forge.

In refusing payment, he said that money was a bad thing, and that he calculated he was better off without it. There was pork in the smokehouse, and Sabina had put up jars of preserved fruit and vegetables by the score. His debts had been surprisingly few. To pay them, he had sold off a team and some implements.

Of clothes he had enough to last for years, since he no longer made the slightest effort to appear off his own place. As usual, however, he kept scrupulously clean when he was not at the anvil. For the rest, barter and trade sufficed to procure from his neighbors the few necessities that he required.

At the end of two years, the Cleve Hammett who was so well known throughout the mountain district had been replaced by an altogether different personality. Willing to work for any one who asked it, he grew more morose and silent; until he began to be called a hermit. Gradually a sinister attachment, vague and mysterious, became associated with his name.

The sheriff of the county came, one day in the late autumn, and asked Cleve in a soothing voice if he wouldn't like to take a ride down to the county seat. There were two men with him, and before Cleve was aware of their intentions they had pin-

ioned his arms to his sides. There was a sharp snap of metal, and when he went to raise his hands he found them joined together at the wrists by a short, bright length of chain.

"Now keep calm, Cleve," the sheriff said coaxingly. "We-all don't mean you any harm, but you'll have to come quietly down to the probate court. There's an action that—"

"You mean," interrupted Cleve, "that I'm being taken before the court to determine my sanity?"

"Something like that, Cleve. Nothing to get excited about, though."

"I suppose not."

His eyes wandered mildly to the dense green woods that bordered the road and sloped up the tangled side of the mountain. For a moment a whimsical smile played on his lips. In the next moment, like a charging bull, he had rammed over the sheriff, had cleared the road, and was disappearing in the thickness of the timber.

For two days he lay in a cave that he had known as a boy. The searchers came near his hiding place, but he felt little fear. They were not likely to find him. Nor would the handcuffs bite into his flesh through any carelessness in trying to widen the space between his fettered wrists. Vividly he recalled the agony of the fugitive bank teller.

"None of that for me!" he told himself. "When they quit watchin' around the forge, I'll slip back an' get my hacksaw. It 'll be a delicate job of sawin', but I can do it. After that—"

He did not know. All that he was sure of was that his freedom should not be taken from him. A man had the right, the God-given privilege, to live as he pleased and to hold what views he pleased.

The difficulty was that when he ventured out of the cave on the second night, in search of wild fruit to appease his hunger, he slipped on a rock. In falling, he stretched out a hand to save himself, and in the next instant he knew that within an hour his flesh would begin to swell over the constricted bands of steel that were biting into his wrists. The pain was already beginning to grow hot.

"If I was crazy, like they think, I'd stay out here and probably die," he said; "but I'm as sane as any man on earth, and I'm going to prove it by walking in and surrendering. It's the only way to save my life."

I'll escape from the asylum, too, when the time comes!"

VII

AT the roadside, as Cleve Hammett crept out of the brush, a dark figure rose up before him.

"Hammett?" a voice said, almost in a whisper.

"Yes."

"I been layin' low, hopin' against hope I might find you somehow. I come back to see *her*; but they told me down in the village that she—that she—"

"Who are you?" Cleve asked.

"I'm the bird you sawed the handcuffs off of. Somebody pinched the money off me, an' I got five years. I served two, an' then I got my chance to make a break from a road gang. I got rid of my prison clothes, an' a tramp I met dug up these rags for me. Then I come back here, just to get one more look at her."

Cleve thrust out his manacled hands in front of him.

"I'm the man who stole your two thousand dollars and sent you to prison. I've carried the money inside my shirt ever since. It's there now. Reach in and get it. It's all the compensation I can make you."

"Why did you do me that dirt?"

The bank teller's voice was tense, ominous, hardened with the association of criminal voices.

"I took it—stole it—to pay for an operation that I hoped would save Sabina's life"

"Oh!" The other man's voice welled into a stifled moan. "You could 'a' had it for the askin', an' I'd 'a' served the time gladly. Listen, brother! You an' me's got somethin' left in common, which is a memory. By all that's holy, we can't just lay down an' curl up. It's up to us, brother, to get together an' make our lives what—what she would 'a' wanted them to be. You with me, brother? We can beat it together to a new part of the country, an'—"

"But the money—the stolen money—what about that?" Cleve Hammett demanded in a rigid voice.

"That dirty stuff? Keep it on you till we get to a post office, an' mail it back to the Traders' National Bank, St. Louis. We'll get plenty more—get it on the level. Listen! If you'll tell me where you keep that little saw of yours, I'll slip back to the shop and get it."

"It's hangin' up on the wall by the forge," Cleve said.

At dawn the two fugitives crawled into the loft of a barn that was filled with fragrant hay. The forge was ten miles behind them. Cleve Hammett was the first to sleep, and in the first relaxation of it he fell to mumbling:

"White hot—clean—under heavy pressure—metal unites—"

"Poor cuss!" said his companion, with a grin. "He's dreamin' about his forge. It looks like we'll have to start a garage or somethin'—in Texas, maybe."

BEAUTY'S REVELATION

'Twas just before you came.
I, who had never even heard your name—
The name that now means all the world to me—
Had said that beauty is no more.

Then, of a sudden, you were in the door,
Lifting your face to me;
And I grew happy,
Gazing, as in the sea,
Deep in your eyes;
And, as of old,
I was no longer wise.

All in an instant was I lost and found;
All in an instant, too,
Divinely drowned.

Andrew McIver Adams

Her Majesty the Star

WHY THE FAMOUS MARCIA MONTAINE AND HER DOUBLE
DECIDED TO TAKE UP NEW LINES OF WORK

By Jack Whitman

THE chic personal maid of Marcia Montaine, Cyril P. De Valle's greatest film star, gave the drawing-room of the Pullman a last look. Yes, everything was as it should be—fifty dollars' worth of American beauties on the table, twenty-five dollars' worth of chocolates beside them, a huge basket of fruit lower down, a pile of magazines, surmounted by the three worst best-sellers, in another corner. With the addition of scented Russian cigarettes and still more strongly scented American chewing gum, even Marcia could contrive to be comfortable.

Céleste knew the degrees of her mistress's temperament. Marcia would either be gushingly pleased with everything, or she would be in a furious rage. Céleste could endure the latter as well as the former. She was a perfect maid.

But not even Céleste was prepared for the quiet entrance of the demure little lady who stepped into the room. The girl was clear-featured, pretty in an indefinably reminiscent way, and her eyes just now were wide in a kind of fascination. They rested upon the roses with a great deal more appreciation than one usually sees, as if roses were sufficiently infrequent in her experience to be worth looking at.

"Hello!" cried Céleste, in a voice decidedly unlike the tone that she reserved for her famous mistress.

"Oh, Céleste! Behold in me the great, the incomparable, the *magnif*—what do you say, *magnifique*?—Marcia Montaine!"

She laughed and held out a purple envelope embossed in the bold gold letters of Marcia's name. Céleste took it and read a brief note:

CÉLESTE, DEAR:

You are to serve Miss Gregg just as if she were me.

The note showed Marcia's grammatical dubiety at this point, and Céleste sniffed.

On the trip she will be Marcia Montaine, and you will always address her that way. Remember! I'll see you on the coast.

MARCIA.

Céleste looked up from the note, puzzled. Then she smiled.

"It will be a great pleasure, *m'm'selle*!"

"For me, too," agreed Miss Gregg, burying her face in the roses.

The porter knocked and brought in a half dozen bags, of all shapes and sizes, all enameled with the illustrious initials of the great star. He hovered about while Céleste indicated their proper disposal.

"Ah seen you-all in 'The Joy ob Life' last week, Miss Montaine. I suah lak you in de pitchers!"

The supposed Miss Montaine placed a bill in his hand, and then snipped off a small rosebud. She smiled her most captivating smile as she fastened it in his lapel. If she was to be well and favorably known as the great screen star, she must begin by making a conquest of the first man she met. It was her duty to give the real Marcia the benefit of the best possible reputation her charm could achieve.

Céleste, inured to the vagaries of her mistress, did not stop to question the substitute. She was frankly pleased with the change, and could look forward with some joy to the trip across the continent, usually a wearisome journey.

Miss Gregg took off her jacket and allowed Céleste to hang it up. Then she explored her quarters. She had never traveled *de luxe* before, and she rather missed the frank democracy of the ordinary car.

Her eyes went to the books in the corner of the room. At least, she thought, she

would have five days to read! But at sight of them she sighed profoundly. She turned a few pages and read a few paragraphs, then picked them up and handed them to Céleste.

"Please give these to the boy who sells candy and things," she instructed. "Perhaps there is some one on the train who will buy them."

Céleste smiled approvingly and hurried out, while Miss Gregg bent over a small bag, unstrapped it, and took out a slender volume of love poems. She made herself comfortable on the pillowed couch and read verses between bites of an apple from the basket of fruit.

Before she realized it the train had passed through the suburbs and was leaving New York behind. Five days of luxury and pretense lay before her. She could have the best meals from the diner brought to her here, and Céleste would serve her with lavish skill. She would wear the best of clothes, and would dine, radiant in fine feathers, among the celebrity worshipers on board. It would be great fun, and would give her just what she had been asking for—a chance to act. Here there was no director, no camera—only an audience.

She gave a low chuckle as she thought of the circumstances that had made this possible. If Marcia hadn't taken it into her head to get married, and to an aviator, of all things, and if the bird man hadn't been a masterful sort of person, little Miss Gregg would be eating a boxed lunch with the rest of the proletariat in a tourist sleeper—with more tourists than sleep.

But Marcia had married an aviator, and he had decided to take his bride to Los Angeles in his own way, refusing to trust her precious, hundred-thousand-a-year person to the dangers of railroading. It happened, too, that Marcia's employer, the Superexcellent Film Corporation, had a different notion about danger. It refused to allow its most valuable asset to risk her life in anything more daring than a shimmy. When her plays required thrills of a physical kind, a double was used; and unless the double was ready to take her place, Marcia couldn't act.

Miss Gregg was the double, and she was always on hand. She was never sick, and she had no nerves. She could do a dozen stunts in a single day and sleep soundly all night. If the script required her to dive off a high cliff into a torrent, she dived. If

it demanded that she should be thrown from a runaway horse, she was thrown. If it called for a fierce fight with a brutal "heavy," with consequent damage to her permanent wave, Miss Gregg put into it all the zest and enthusiasm of a healthy young animal.

Moreover, Marcia was prohibited by the terms of her munificent contract from doing anything that would endanger her health, beauty, or reputation. There was no specific prohibition of matrimony, so she had taken a chance on that; but she couldn't fly with her new husband across the continent unless she succeeded in keeping it a dark, dark secret.

The aviator had suggested the extra-pictorial use of the double. Mary Gregg looked more like Marcia's pictures than Marcia herself, although their actual resemblance was not unusually close. Such are the tricks of the camera, and of make-up, that if you had just emerged from a theater where one of Marcia's features was shown, and had encountered the two girls on the street, you would have passed the real actress by and bet your last penny that Mary Gregg was the famous star.

Mary did the really hard work, and received fifty dollars a week. Marcia had the name and the contract, and received two thousand dollars a week.

Once there was a learned Frenchman who wrote a book with the alluring title, "The Right to be Lazy." Marcia Montaine would have been ideal in the leading rôle of the screen adaptation.

Aside from their camera-born resemblance, the girls were as different as possible. Marcia was timid, vain, and very much of a spoiled child. Mary was self-reliant, well poised, and studious, and didn't know the meaning of the word danger.

She had received Marcia's suggestion—command, rather—that she should play the part of the star on board the train with a mixture of joy and amusement. It would be great fun, and yet she doubted her ability to display the required amount of temperament. She knew that she could never treat Céleste as Marcia did, for she had a great deal of respect for the maid's ability.

Besides, she had always found it difficult to think of herself as an actress. Her little success in the pictures had sprung entirely from the accident of her camera resemblance to Marcia, which a discerning camera man had detected in her first appearance

upon the celluloid. After that she had achieved a little fame in the picture colony as Marcia's double, but she had never tried to pursue any of the paths of preference that led to stardom.

Nearly all those paths, she had observed, were thronged with men whom she could not like. Besides, fifty dollars a week was a great deal, almost spelling contentment, to a girl who had been earning twenty as a stenographer.

Mary had her dreams, but they were not of the pictures. She would much rather ride horses, do high dives, leap aboard moving trains, and perform the other stunts called for in the script for her own amusement, as pure adventure, than as a means of livelihood. Often she dreamed of a life in which her daring would be of real, instead of reel, value. She read of explorers in the arctic, adventurers in the South Seas, archaeologists in the Cambodian jungles—and she dreamed vaguely of a man who was one or all of these things, at whose side she could play and work and fight.

A knock came on the door of the drawing-room, and Céleste, who had busied herself unpacking the bags, sprang up to answer it. The manager of the dining car had called to pay his respects and to offer Miss Montaine the very best he could provide. At Mary's suggestion, Céleste ordered luncheon to be served in the drawing-room—luncheon for two.

When it came, the maid laid the table in state—for one, expecting to eat her own meal after her majesty the star had finished; but Mary laid another plate and seated Céleste opposite her.

"We don't have to be absurd here, my dear," she said.

"But Mlle. Montaine has written—"

"Oh, bother Marcia! If we keep up the bluff when there's an audience, that's all she can expect. When we're alone, we can be human."

II

It required all Mary's daring, and more poise than she knew she possessed, to endure the celebrity worship of the dining car that evening. Every one on the train had been informed that the great Marcia Montaine was there. Gossip was rife. The newsboy sold hundreds of copies of a "fan" magazine containing Marcia's picture and a wild publicity story about her bravery.

Forks dropped, eating stopped, and a whispered "There she is!" greeted Mary as she entered and took her place at the table. Wearing a gown of vivid green, more décolleté than Mary Gregg would have chosen, with her cheeks and lips and eyes done in Marcia's extreme style, and a glistening dinner ring upon her finger, she was all that any one could have demanded in the way of publicly acclaimed beauty.

The rustling leaves of magazines told her that people were comparing her with Marcia's picture, to the latter's disparagement. Men and women stared at her with no consciousness of effrontery, as they would have stared at a snake charmer in a side show. Their comments, in the hush of her entrance, were distinctly audible.

"They say she gets five thousand a week," said a traveling salesman.

"Gee, she's sure a stunner!" commented his vis-à-vis.

"Cousin Bell's prettier than her," announced a plump lady cattishly.

"It must be wonder-ful to be so famous!" sighed a flapper.

"I wonder if she's a good girl," murmured a lady whose face would never lead her into temptation.

"All them movie dames is fast," said a man of the world who followed the ponies, and his eyes gleamed. "Why, when I was in Tia Juana—"

He lowered his voice to the tone of the confidentially wicked.

A little girl of about ten, leaving the car with her parents, paused to inform Mary that she had seen her in the pictures a few days before.

"Did you, dear? And did you like me?"

Mary's tone was low and modulated, and her smile gentle. It won the car as Marcia herself could not have done.

"Oh, yes! I loved you!"

The child's words were in pleasing contrast to the others she had heard.

"I'm glad you did," she said simply, and then whispered: "I have some candy in my drawing-room that you'll love just as well!"

The child ran off happily, telling her mother about the candy, and the good lady who had wondered about the personal morality of the great star sighed happily. It was the simple canon of her faith that no one who offered candy to a child could be anything but "good."

Before she had finished dinner and retired to the security of her drawing-room, Mary felt the need of a bodyguard. Two vapid youngsters, pretty in the bloom of youth, introduced themselves, uttered conventional flattery, and wanted to know how to get into the pictures. She advised them, very kindly, to go to college and acquire a profession.

Men of all ages and kinds, from the blushing boy at the next table to the race track tout, flirted with her. She looked at all of them with an impersonal smile which each, in his turn, translated into a subtle encouragement.

A rather fat man with a high pompadour, wearing gold-rimmed spectacles on the end of a wide black ribbon, and bearing the mark of the consciously intellectual, stopped at her table to ask her to read two scenarios. She consented amiably, although she knew from his brief descriptions that they were hopeless, dealing with what he called "great problems" subject to ban by all boards of censorship.

She sighed with relief when she finally reached the haven of her room, and could describe the scene to appreciative Céleste; but she felt some gratification, as well, for she had created an impression in which Marcia would have reveled.

III

THE following day, out of Chicago, was a trying one. Mary could not emerge from her room without being accosted by a screen-struck flapper, a hopeful scenario writer, or a flirtatious man. Every one considered her public property, and did not wish to allow her any privacy.

The observation platform was infested, as soon as she ventured upon it, with people who wanted to talk to her; and in her part as Marcia she had to talk. The worst of it was that they all talked shop. She wished heartily that some one would appear, besides Céleste, with whom she could converse on some topic unrelated to the making of pictures.

Just when she had lost hope of his coming, he did appear.

Céleste came to inform her, after luncheon, that the observation platform was deserted, and that she might breathe the clean Iowa air with the security of solitude. Mary caught up her volume of poems and went out. She sat down and lost herself in the book, and did not notice the ap-

proach of a man whom she had not seen before.

He was tall, rather gaunt of face, and very strongly built. He sat down on the other side of the platform and pulled a book out of a loose pocket. He paid no attention to the famous personage beside him.

If he had looked closely at her, he would not have known her. He had never seen a motion picture in his life; he did not know that "fan" magazines existed. He only read the *Atlantic Monthly* and the *Archæological Quarterly*. His annual income was precisely the same as Marcia Montaine's weekly stipend. He was Professor Richard Poindexter, field archæologist for Cromwell University.

Mary didn't know he was there until the book he was reading dropped to the floor. She turned at the sound, expecting it to be the overture of another flirtation, and saw him for the first time.

"Now I've lost my place!" he said, in the tone of exasperation that one reserves for the obstinacy of inanimate objects.

Mary smiled and observed that he was reading a book she had lately finished—a record of adventure in Tahiti. The man began to turn the pages nervously, as if in haste to resume the narrative. There was something very boyish about his eagerness, and Mary went on smiling. He caught her looking at him, and his eyes lighted up as they fell upon the book she was reading.

"That's a good thing," he said, pointing to the book.

He reached out to take it from her. Like most booklovers, he seemed to feel that any of his favorites belonged to him, even though some one else had bought it.

She surrendered the little volume. He opened it and began to read, in a clear, well modulated voice, one of the poems she liked best. It described the ruins of Angkor Vat, in the Cambodian jungle, and suggested a romance between one of Alexander's satraps and a Cambodian princess, long ago.

Nothing is so conducive to friendliness as the discovery of a mutual liking for poetry. For many centuries wise lovers have based their wooing upon that bond of sympathy.

He had been to the ruins, it seemed, and could vouch for the truth of the description. Quite overlooking the formality of an introduction, he told her of the work of French archæologists there, and of what

they had found after cutting their way through miles of jungle. He traced the influence of Greek art in the ruins, and outlined the theory, held by some scientists, that one of the far-flung legions of Alexander the Great had really penetrated to the ancient kingdom.

"Do any women ever go to places like that, or do work of that kind?" Mary asked.

"Women? Not often. They are taking up archaeology nowadays, like almost everything else; but a woman would have to be pretty strong and mighty brave to succeed in that line."

"I should like to—but of course I don't know anything about it."

He had not looked at Mary in a personal way before. Now he observed her lithe, strong figure in a way that made her blush, although she knew that he was unaware of her beauty. He was seeing her on desert and jungle trails, in riding breeches, making her way beside him to some Mecca of antiquity.

"I believe you could," he said, in unreserved commendation. "I'm going into Mexico now, after I outfit at Los Angeles. Oh, it will be a great trip, and I hope to find great things!"

Céleste came to warn Mary that the exodus from the dining car was under way. The curious would swoop down upon her unless she retreated. She got up.

"Oh, I say, you aren't running away, are you?" asked the professor. "It's unusual to find a girl who is interested in digging up ruins."

"Yes, I must—now!"

She gave him a flashing smile, and the student of antiquity felt suddenly aware of modernity's charms.

IV

MARY was not quick enough to avoid the vanguard of the diners. The pony follower bowed low to her and winked as she passed, and she had to make her way down an aisle lined with staring pairs of eyes. It was enough to make even Marcia blush.

The race track tout slapped Richard Poindexter familiarly on the back. The professor looked up with a trace of surprised anger.

"Sly old dog!" said the life of the club car. "You get the great Marcia out here all alone when no one else has a chance. Pretty wise lad!"

"I'm afraid I don't understand you,"

observed the professor icily. "To whom do you refer?"

Icy tones meant nothing before the genial warmth of the other man.

"Ah, there, wise boy! You can't spoof me—I'm psychic. Marcia who, say you? Why, Marcia Montaine, say I—the one and only, the great and incomparable, the famous and irresistible Marcia! Don't tell me you don't know her!"

He poked the professor gleefully in the ribs.

"The name is unfamiliar to me," Poindexter said with dignity.

The tout turned to a group of men who had come up.

"Can you beat this Maxim silencer, buddies?" he demanded. "Here I find him sitting chewing the fat like it was molasses candy with our little Marcia—and the name is unfamiliar to him!"

Hearty laughter greeted this sally.

"But who is this Miss Montaine whom you know so well?" inquired the professor.

The other was shocked—earnestly, sincerely shocked.

"Man alive!" he exclaimed, in unbelief. "Do you mean to tell me you never heard of Marcia Montaine? Why, you must have lived all your life in the sticks! You don't look ignorant, either. How come—you sitting here chatting away like you'd known her all your life, and not even knowing her name? What was you talking about?"

"We were discussing archaeology, although I don't know that it's any of your business."

"That's all right, doc—no harm meant; but you sure surprise me a whole lot. I'll put you hep. This here Marcia Montaine filly is better-known than the League of Nations. She's got her name in electric lights on the Broadway or Main Street of every city, town, and hamlet from New York to Frisco. She earns the royal wage of five thousand a week. Every day six letter carriers tote her mail to her. She's had more pictures taken of her beautiful face than any other woman in the world. Outside of Mary Pickford, there ain't another star on the screen can touch her—an' I got my private opinion about which is the queen of the movies!"

"Oh!" said the professor. "You mean to say that she is a leading woman in the cinema?"

"Thunder! What I mean is she's the greatest little jane that ever got over bein'

camera shy. She ain't just a star—she's a constellation!"

"Very interesting, I'm sure," said the professor, picking up his book and moving unconcernedly away.

V

PROFESSOR POINDEXTER did not hasten the preparations for his Mexican journey. He preferred to linger in Los Angeles, and he took to visiting picture theaters with a frequency that would have shocked his austere confrères. He invariably went to the pleasure palaces where he could catch a glimpse of Marcia Montaine, although he found that he did not like her on the screen as well as in person. He concluded that it was the fault of the silly stories in which she appeared, and of the sensational director who condemned her to such unworthy work. He could not well imagine the heroine of saccharine and tawdry romances as the calm, well poised, intelligent girl he had met on the train.

They had talked together long and often on the train, until the gossips of both sexes decided that Marcia was indeed a vampire, and the mother of the child to whom she had given candy kept her offspring safely away.

The professor confessed to himself that he was deeply attracted; but he had to consider the vast disparity between his annual two thousand dollars and Marcia's reported five thousand a week. Nevertheless, he determined to make use of the card she had given him and call upon her at the studio.

Truth to tell, Mary had tried to avoid giving him the card, but his persistence had overcome her reluctance.

When the card was sent in to Marcia herself, she protested that she had never heard of any such professor, and couldn't be bothered.

The professor insisted that there must be some mistake, and scribbled on the card:

The dank Cambodian jungle.

This, of course, was more than meaningless to the great Marcia.

"He's a nut!" she exclaimed. "Have him pinched or something, and don't bother me any more."

Céleste overheard the colloquy, and endeavored to steal out to inform Mary Gregg, who was somewhere on the lot, that her friend was calling. But her mistress's temper had not been improved by aviation

or marriage, and she was called back with a scream that no one but a person of temperament could possibly achieve.

So it was that the professor made his way from the Superexcellent studio with the bitter reflection that he was a fool, and that Marcia Montaine was utterly fickle and shockingly insincere.

He was stopping at the home of Lester Harris, one of those rich and genial loafers whose mission in life is to entertain any and all celebrities who come their way. Whether it was a learned scientist or a champion pugilist, a great tragedian or a vaudeville buffoon, a famous sculptor or a popular cartoonist, sooner or later Harris threw out the charming tentacles of his position and dragged the coveted guest to his heart and hearth. He was a patron of any and all the arts. Unable to do anything himself, he courted those whose achievement might reflect credit upon him.

The professor found him in the patio of his Spanish home. A beautiful formal garden spread before them; in its center a swimming pool glistened in the sunlight. The house itself was correct in every detail, the exact reproduction of a palace in Seville.

"My dear professor," Harris began, when a Korean boy had served them with drinks, "I have a rare treat in store for you. To-morrow some of my motion picture friends are to have the use of my garden. They are to shoot some scenes from a Spanish play. I often allow it, you know, for it is an interesting and amusing sight. A few will come for luncheon—just my friends, you know—and the rest of the company will be here in the afternoon. I understand there will be some thrills about the swimming pool. No doubt we shall be entertained."

"No doubt," agreed the professor, who was dwelling with some bitterness upon the kind of entertainment he had already received from a certain motion picture star.

Luncheon was served in the garden next day. Most of the guests were seated at the table when Richard Poindexter left his room and his work and joined them. Harris rose to greet him.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he announced in the tones of a showman, "allow me to present my dear friend, Professor Poindexter, the celebrated archaeologist."

All Harris's guests were "dear friends" and "celebrated."

"Archie who?" stammered a blond girl at the end of the table.

The professor bowed and took a chair beside Harris. As he glanced up, he looked into the face of Marcia Montaine, who was paying no attention to him, but was devotedly gazing into the eyes of her tanned, slender young husband.

The professor gasped, but said nothing.

Marcia murmured something to Harris, at which he laughed. Then she turned to the professor, and gave him a bold stare that meant absolutely nothing. He was embarrassed, and blushed like a boy. Marcia noticed it, and prided herself upon another conquest.

When she spoke again, Poindexter sensed a hard quality in her voice that was not at all like that of the girl on the train. He looked at her more closely, and saw that her eyes were bold, not with the quiet assurance of the girl on the train, but with a brazen quality that proclaimed:

"I'm a great star; who are you?"

It was very strange. It was inconceivable that a person could change so much in so short a time. The professor found himself staring at her, trying to make out the indefinable yet unmistakable difference.

He got through the luncheon somehow, laughing when the others laughed, murmuring meaningless conventionalities to the girl beside him, whose face he never saw, and eating the rich food which was part of Harris's bait without tasting it.

He detected, too, several slips in grammar from the lips of Marcia, and sometimes her affected speech could not conceal a nasal twang that she had acquired in youth. Poindexter wondered if he had been such a fool, or so blindly in love, that he had not observed such things on the train. There must be some other explanation, he decided. She must be playing a part, or rehearsing.

Still puzzled, he took his place beside his host when the director called his forces together and started to "shoot." The members of the company who had lunched from pasteboard boxes under the trees came up. Several pictures were taken of Marcia and her sleek leading man, against the picturesque walls of Harris's Spanish mansion. The professor saw, in her actions before the camera, the Marcia he had seen upon the screen, but not the Marcia of the observation car.

After doing little more than standing motionless with a rather silly expression,

gazing up at her leading man, Marcia announced to the director that she had finished her work for the day.

"All right, my dear," he agreed. "We've got enough of that stuff now, and you mustn't tire yourself. I'll shoot the pool action now."

VI

THE company gathered around the director, and listened to his instructions. They were to enact a sequence of scenes representing a rather wild party, supposedly given by a Spanish millionaire in honor of a great actress. The millionaire, who was the villain of the piece, was impersonated by a fat little "heavy," whose chief gift was a vicious face that made him invaluable for such rôles. He was to pursue the lovely heroine about the pool, attempting to kiss her, and she was to flee up the ladder to the high diving platform, where they were to struggle violently.

This was one of the big scenes of the picture, and a camera platform had been erected to get it all. Naturally, the Superexcellent would not allow Marcia Montaine herself to take such a risk, for the action demanded a high dive, backward, into the pool. Mary Gregg was to replace the star.

"Got the action, Miss Gregg? And yours, Bill? All right—we start quiet in the pool. All you people are playing around. Bill gets fresh with Miss Gregg, and she gets frightened and tries to escape him. Not a chance! He's half drunk, and it's his party. Good old chase stuff, see? Then, when I say the word, up the ladder and do the sure-fire battle on the platform. Prolong it for all you can get. Then you hit him, Miss Gregg, and stagger off backward. Get your bearings right, and play safe."

The director arranged the company about the pool, and started the action.

"The sun's going," he said, "so we won't rehearse this. Do it right, people, and we'll call it a day."

They went through the action up to Miss Gregg's ascent of the ladder. Mary was dressed in a cheap imitation of Marcia's costume, and at long distance, through the eye of the camera, it would be impossible to detect the "doubling."

As she got to the top of the ladder, the director called "Cut!" and the action abruptly ceased. Mary came down for a rest

and a sandwich. The next scene would be the hard one.

Before she had finished the sandwich, the director ordered her to the diving platform again. She went up the ladder, nonchalantly munching the sandwich. The professor, who had been watching so many episodes that he had seen none clearly, like a small boy in a three-ring circus, recognized her easy grace at once. Turning around, he saw Marcia calmly smoking a cigarette and paying no attention to the work of her double.

Then he understood, at least partially, his perplexity at luncheon. He led Harris aside.

"Who's that?" he demanded, pointing up at Mary.

"Oh, she's only Marcia's double—does all the thrilling things, you know. Pretty, too, in her way, but not a great actress like Marcia. Looks enough like her to get away with it. All the great stars have doubles, you know, except Fairbanks and two or three others."

The action started again, cameras grinding. Poindexter saw the girl on the platform look down at her pursuer. He saw her terror as she trembled there and sought a higher refuge. Then the man reached her and seized her in his arms. She fought him like a tiger. Twice, three times, they almost tumbled over the edge into the pool below.

The professor's heart stopped beating, and the realism of it caught him completely. He clenched his hands and wanted to go to the girl's aid. He saw her struggle free, back away in apparent fear to the edge of the pool, strike out and land a

stunning blow on the villain's jaw, and then, weak and exhausted, fall over backward into the water. He did not notice the look of fear on the actor's face; all he cared for was the safety of Marcia's double.

He strode over to the edge of the pool. As he got there, the laughing face of Mary Gregg came up through the silver water. She stopped swimming in utter surprise, and started to sink again. He reached out and seized her shoulder, dragging her to the tiled side. She looked up into his eyes and hummed softly:

"The dank Cambodian jungle—"

"My God, I was afraid!" muttered the dignified professor.

According to the omniscient press agent of the Superexcellent Film Corporation, whom we are privileged to quote:

Miss Marcia Montaine, the great emotional actress, since the completion of her Spanish picture, "Carmen's Sister," which is breaking all records, has busied herself in the selection of a new type of play. Hereafter she will be seen in drama of a psychological kind, and will no longer perform the thrilling feats that have made her name a proverb for grace, agility, and daring. It has been felt for a long time that Miss Montaine's emotional talent would be displayed to the best advantage in stories of a deeper spiritual significance.

The other side of the case is represented by one of Marcia's unkind critics, who recently remarked:

"Marcia Montaine's double got married and left the films. This leaves Marcia in a bad way, for the girl can't act. If, as is announced, she goes in for the deep and quiet drama, her pictures will be nothing but close-ups separated by subtitles."

What Marcia herself said was:

"And after all I done for her, too!"

TAPESTRIES

My friend stands motionless, hands linked behind,
Where tapestries hang lifeless in the gloom
Of corridors reëchoing, room on room.
Outside, he walks with blind eyes, absent mind.
The tapestry of far-off flaming hills
Misted in blue and gray autumnal haze;
A pansy bowl, thick-carpeted; the glaze
Of sharp frost etched along cold window sills;
The wavering green surface of the deep;
The scattered yellow leaves that scuff along;
The limitless black space where stars belong,
When silence wins a weary world to sleep—
I wish that I could wake my friend to see
In life and all the earth a tapestry!

Mary Louise Mable

Borrowed Fire

HOW A KENTUCKY MOUNTAIN FEUD CAME TO NEW ENGLAND

By Charles Neville Buck

Author of "The Roof Tree," "The Mountain Woman," etc.

XXIII

INTO Dick Carson's face came a look of stupefied wonder as his wife's scream broke from her parted lips. He flung her back from him, and took a step forward, as if he were an experimenter in the art of walking. For a moment he stood with an incredulous, shocked expression in his eyes, and stretched out one groping hand before him, while the other went to a spreading gush of wetness on his breast. Then a dark trickle came from his lips, as he tottered and collapsed, falling with his face upward.

Phyllis stood for one of those eternally long parts of an instant when life rushes through æons while time waits. She stood as if the bolt that had struck Dick out of her arms, and stretched him at her feet, had also severed from her brain every contact with the nerves of volition or movement. She could see the white-flanneled body lying in the moonlight, with a dark spot spreading fast on its breast and an ominous stream dropping from its still lips.

She could see the blocked bulk of the house sleeping in shadow, and the silvery glint of its shingled roof under the moon. A low, dirge-like sound came to her ears, and vaguely she knew that it had broken from her own heart and run in its muffled agony through her vivid lips.

She wheeled, swaying on her feet as her stunned senses cleared a little, and strained her eyes toward the woods from which the shot had come. Irrelevantly she remembered that before he fell Dick had looked that way, too, and that, stricken as he was, he had tried to walk not away from it, but toward it—had tried with the last of his breath to face his assailant.

She sought to cry out denunciation and repudiation for the man who had come to serve her, and for the infamy of his service. She wanted to testify there in the presence of death itself, and in the shadow of immortality, that she had no part in this monstrous thing. Her voice failed her, and the ragged pines stood silent, unresponsive, and seemingly empty, except for the soft call of a tree toad.

She must do something. She could not stand there idle, voiceless, inefficient—yet she could neither move nor speak.

Then the paralysis broke in the eruption of a hysteria more terrible than sobs or shrieks. It broke in the wild, uncontrollable laughter that spills, wave upon wave, from a brain broken loose from its anchorage of reason. It shook and racked her, and she could not stop it. She was a puppet of flesh possessed and victimized by a devil of hysteria; and yet she, who could in nowise control the sound, realized its horror and resented its sacrilege.

She struggled to smother it, clutching at her lips with her hands, as if a sane self were seeking to overpower by physical force the ravings of an insane double. After a little while she conquered the paroxysm, and for the moment drew herself back from the abyss of utter madness.

It had been a little time only, this eternity, and now she was on her knees by the figure that lay stretched there just where the shadow bit off the moonlight. As she thrust her arm under the motionless shoulders, and lifted the face, a sudden access of new strength and sanity stole through her; for the eyes in the still face had not turned back, as eyes turn back in sudden death. They were open, and, though no muscle stirred in the body or the face, there

was a spark of living light in them, as if the soul had lingered on after the stopping of heart and pulse.

Those eyes were looking into hers and pouring out upon her an infinity of anathema and execration.

Then the lips stirred, too, very faintly. In stirring, they brought a fresh trickle of darkness from their corners.

"Laughing!" breathed the man, almost inaudibly, but with a withering bitterness. "You're laughing—while I die!"

"No, no, Dick!" she protested in whispered vehemence, astonished to find that she could speak again. "I was crazed. I was on the edge, Dick—the sheer edge of mania!"

Again, but this time without sound, his lips shaped the word:

"Laughing!"

"You shan't die!" she swore to him. "You must live. I can't let you die. You must live—to understand!"

But as he lay with his head pressed to her breast, and the blood from his wound spreading to the gossamer whiteness of her gown and throat, the eyes with their vestige of consciousness had passed her by, and were gazing toward the dark depths of the woods. She did not follow that glance, because her own was riveted to his face—riveted with the hypnotic will to hold him away from death by some magic of sheer will. She dared not look away.

Dick Carson was seeing a thing which, had the frayed strand of his life snapped at that moment, would have left its photograph registered on his retina, to go with him to his grave. He was exchanging glances with another human being, who also expected soon to die; and in that exchange was a challenge given and taken in the shadow of death.

Standing without a word or a movement just where the dense foliage smudged off the moonlight was a tall, silhouetted figure, with a rifle swinging at its side. It emerged into the light, and a shaft of radiance struck across its rugged features, throwing them into a bold clarity of flesh and bone and spirit. It was a figure of the blood feud personified, and yet it was a figure, too, of strange and patriarchal zealotry. In the eyes was neither vindictiveness nor repentance, neither murder lust nor any haunting of conscience—only the quiet of absolute finality.

Of that recognition and that passage of

silent defiance Phyllis saw nothing. She was murmuring her agonized protestations of innocence, struggling to shrive herself in her husband's eyes before death took him.

"I tried only to save you, Dick!" she reiterated. "I mean to save you yet. You shan't die. God won't let you die!"

It was as if he did not hear her until the figure upon which his gaze was fixed seemed to dissolve into the shadow, like a part of the shadow itself. Then, when it was gone, he looked back at his wife.

"No," he whispered faintly, and his lips twisted into a smile of such bitter irony that it cramped her soul with misery. "No—I don't mean to die. I mean to live—until I punish you!"

He stopped, and the trickle of blood from his lips became a fuller hemorrhage; but still his resolution carried him, as if he were holding death back with one hand while he finished.

"Punish you—with your Judas signal—and your damned laughter—you and your murder henchman—both!"

Her answer was a groan of despair. He still fought for words.

"Then," he whispered, "I can die—not till then."

A rush of blood came from his mouth, and his head fell back. Consciousness had gone from him.

Perhaps this time it was the end. Perhaps his eyes would never open again in life. The woman knew that they had seen as it were the lifting of a curtain across the pit of hell, and that in that hideous picture she had stood as a spirit belonging there.

XXIV

Nor until now had Phyllis screamed for help. Hardly until now had she realized that the world contained any other living person save the three actors in this awful tragedy. She and Dick and the essentials of their lives had been flung at a breath into a chaos in which all fixed laws were loosened and disrupted. The house over which brooded the calm stillness of the summer night had seemed star spaces away.

But now her cries sounded with the startling and imperative staccato of terror. Inside the house, Kayami laid aside the chamois with which he was industriously polishing a silver ladle, and bent his head to listen.

Already he had heard a sound like the

report of a gun, and had paused for an incurious instant, only to nod and resume his task. He had supposed it to be the back fire of an engine out in the garage, where McDonough was constantly tinkering with the car. Just after that he had heard the faint echo of distant laughter. Had his unemotional calmness been ruffled by the first sound, it would have been reassured by the second; but his Oriental soul had acquired merit through the attainment of tranquillity, and he concerned himself with his polishing cloth and his silver ladle to the exclusion of matters occurring beyond his threshold.

Now, however, there was no mistaking the note of distress and of vital appeal in the cries that came in from the moonlit calm of the garden. With a surprising swiftness that seemed to glide without friction, he ran from the house. As he went, he heard a door slam overhead, and caught from the stairs the startled, querulous voice of Martha, who had been frightened by the strange sounds she heard.

Out on the terrace Kayami paused to look about him, but only for a moment. There in the light which was almost as effective as that of day, though less glaring and colorful, he saw a picture that winged his haste.

Across the lawn, disheveled and demoralized of appearance, his mistress was struggling in an effort to drag along some burden which overmatched her strength. She bent and strained, lifted and stumbled. As she came, a few inches at a time, she was calling wildly for help.

Then he made out that the dragging burden, white under the moon, was the body of his master, and that seemingly it was lifeless.

In a moment Kayami reached the spot. He bent down, to stagger up again, bearing in the surprisingly stout arms of his squat body a weight that sagged pitifully, and that stained him at its touch with dark smears.

Relieved of her task, Phyllis came to her feet, and stood giddily for a moment gathering her strength. The Japanese paid no further heed to her, but plodded steadily on to the house, through its entrance door, and to a cushioned window seat that stretched under the many-paned windows of the living room.

A high-pitched shriek from the frightened maid saluted his entrance with his

pitiful burden. He ignored it, and snapped out a hissing command:

"Hush that damn nonsense! Go get madam—she outside!"

He himself was ripping away the stained shirt and undershirt from the wounded body, getting down to the lacerated flesh, and tearing what was still serviceable of the discarded garments into strips with which to stanch the tidal flow of blood. To this work, which would not wait, he devoted himself with singleness of attention. When he had done it as well as his haste permitted, he rose and addressed himself to other tasks.

There are dogs which are called one-man dogs, and had Kayami been canine instead of human he would have been a one-man dog. His loyalty was strong and single to Dick Carson and to Dick Carson's wife. Dick's life hung flickering, unless it had already been extinguished, and each second was relentless in its flight. In this emergency the little Japanese moved with the expeditious precision of a competent machine. One might almost have fancied that in whatever school he had been trained to the duties of a gentleman's servant, there had been a course devoted to "conduct when, without warning, the master is shot down at his front door."

Though his swarthy, almond-eyed face was drawn to the tautness of agitation, Kayami's movements were as steady as if they had been thoroughly rehearsed. He telephoned for a physician. He summoned McDonough, and dispatched him, with a car, to bring an officer of the law. He poured brandy between the blue lips from which he had bathed away the blood, and covered with a blanket the torso which he had stripped naked to examine.

Then, and then only, it occurred to him to look around for his mistress, and for the maid whom he had, with no seeming result, sent to her assistance. The house was apparently empty, except for himself and the motionless figure on the window seat. Again Kayami went out, to discover Phyllis still lying where she had fallen in a faint on the wet grass, with Martha rocking hysterically and uselessly over her.

"She's dead!" wailed the girl. "She's stone dead, and I can't lift her up! Oh, dear God, she's dead!"

What Kayami said hurt no one. It burst contemptuously from him in the guttural tongue of his nativity. He swung the slen-

der figure of his unconscious mistress into his arms, and bore it into the house, to deposit it on a couch in the writing room, where it lay like a rumpled and withered blossom that had once been beautiful.

Dr. Merton's car was recognizable by ear to most of the householders who lived in the jurisdiction of his practice. It had the habit of roaring along with a song of speed, even when the call was not an urgent one. To-night he was going to a man who might be already dead, or might yet hold a feeble spark of life in his breast, and he took his corners on two wheels. But the doctor had not been at home, and it had been needful to call him out of the moving picture theater, so that for all his speed McDonough, carrying the deputy sheriff, made almost a dead heat of the race, and the two men entered the house together.

Kayami was crouched over the still body of his master as the white glare of the approaching headlights raked the drive. As the physician, with the deputy sheriff at his elbow, stepped into the lighted door of the living room, Kayami rose from the squatting posture of a bronze Buddha at the edge of the window seat, and swept away the blanket, unveiling the deathlike stillness in which his master lay. His beady eyes turned with an exhortation for haste, and his voice was unsteady as he declared:

"I 'fraid you too late!"

His first swift scrutiny of the pallid features caused Dr. Merton to feel the same fear; but he opened his bag without a word, stripped off his coat, and turned back his sleeves. The physician was going into action, and the clear-cut angles of his jaw seemed to sharpen.

The stained wound upon the left breast held his gaze. As yet it was unexplored as to range and course. If there was any stirring of pulse or breath, it was too faint to declare itself to the unaided senses of sight or hearing. Dick Carson looked like a shell from which life had utterly emptied itself, and Dr. Merton, as he bent over the motionless body, wondered for a moment whether this was a case for him or for the coroner.

Abruptly the physician rose and wheeled.

"There's life here yet," he asserted crisply. "There's a flutter—the barest flutter. We've got to fight!"

And he fought, while the others stood watching tensely. To Kayami it was not unlike the making of some magic. The

doctor had crushed a tiny crystal globule in a thin handkerchief. As he laid the cloth, suddenly wet, over the wounded man's nostrils, the penetrating odor of amyl nitrate—a smell of almost edged cleanness—permeated the room.

Then Merton was dissolving the strychnia for his hypodermic—an operation that must consume some hundred precious seconds—while the quiet watchfulness of his gaze seemed nursing the spent spark of ebbing life. It was less a spark than a dying ember, less a vital fluid than lees and dregs.

Merton fought this first battle against death from shock, knowing that when he had won it—if he could win it—the warfare was only begun. He realized that beyond lay hours, days, and perhaps weeks, when death would still be attacking, and when life must grimly hold to a desperate defensive; but now his task was single, and singly purposeful was his acceptance of it.

The physician was a man of spare and lengthy frame, with features that set themselves to an unsmiling and deceptive semblance of sternness, yet which soon came to proclaim an understanding and sympathy more heartening than affability. Now his grave face seemed, to the onlookers, to have assumed some subtle touch of the heroic, making him stand out for what he was—a combatant in a warfare which was epic.

The tall grandfather clock on the stairway ticked on, its small sound seeming to grow in loudness with the lengthening of the silence; yet it had ticked away only a short time since Merton had crossed the threshold—so short a time, indeed, that in the adjoining room Phyllis still lay on the couch, mercifully insensible to the near-by trembling of the scales of human existence.

Presently, however, Martha, who sat rocking and moaning querulously, saw her lids rise flickeringly, and knew that she was beginning to grope in shadows against which realization shimmered and faded. The anodyne of unconsciousness was leaving her, but it left her in a lurid dream, through which flashed some knowledge of the immediate past, fragmentary and tattered, torturing but insufficient.

Gradually Phyllis's senses cleared. She remembered what had happened in the garden, but it seemed that she could not move. She knew that there were lights and presences beyond her door. She could even see the shadow of the busy doctor moving large and dark against the wall; but there was

silence there, and it was a silence that might mean death.

She must go into that room and find out. Her place was there, and—she knew it with a flash of revelation—her heart was there, too; but a lethal torpor seemed to bind and hold her helpless.

When Merton, with the first of his battles ended, had leisure to pause and look about the room, he saw a picture framed in the doorway which held his eyes and brought into them the realization of a second fight awaiting him.

Phyllis stood there struggling to come forward, and able only to stand unsteadily leaning against the support of the door jamb. Her lips were colorless and trembling with the futility of attempted speech, and out of her ashen pallor her eyes seemed flaming in spurts of color. Her gown was torn and stained. Upon its fabric, as upon the flesh of her bare arms and throat, spots of blood, not her own, were drying from a wet red to a stiffened brown.

The eyes of the officer and the servant followed those of the physician. As if this concentration of attention were challenging her to a supreme effort, she moved away from her support and whispered faintly:

"Is he—alive?"

"Alive, yes," the doctor quickly assured her. "Our first fight is won. His heart is beginning to function again."

There was a sound in her throat which might have meant anything—an exhalation from lungs stifled and constrained by the clutch of terror. She took a forward step, as if she were dragging with her imponderable weights. She swayed, and it was the physician who caught her and placed her in a chair. Once more she had swooned.

Again Dr. Merton opened his hypodermic case. As he did so, Jim Eldredge, the deputy sheriff, laid a restraining hand on his elbow.

"Just a minute, doctor," he interrupted. It was the first time he had spoken. "Are you going to put her to sleep?"

The doctor gave an affirmative nod. Again the officer raised his hand.

"I shouldn't like to interfere," he said slowly; "but there's a question or two I've got to ask her, before it's too late. My work hasn't begun yet, and I don't know as it can afford to wait."

The physician's voice was as sharply imperative as an order from the bridge of a ship.

"It *must* wait, Jim!"

Eldredge was a heavily built man, with a face that fell into lines of habitual kindness, but also of determination. He paused, his eyes showing first dubious irresolution, then a hardening of purpose.

"I don't want to hinder or hamper you with cross purposes," he said; "but I came here as the representative of the law. A man's been shot, and it looks like somebody tried to murder him. He may die. She may die, too, for all I know; and she was with him at the time."

"To-morrow—" began the physician, but the officer cut him short.

"To-morrow won't do, doctor. To-morrow the criminal may be hundreds of miles away. Maybe she can help us out, and it ought to be right now. The law's got an interest in this thing, and I've got my oath of office to consider."

Merton squared the bend of his shoulders, and stood between the slender figure of the helpless woman and the formidable bulk of the man who, in the name and authority of the law, sought to question her. It was as if she were a prize over which their two wills had crossed swords of resolution. The doctor's voice and manner were inflexible.

"I'm fighting death here, Jim," he said steadily. "Perhaps I'm fighting insanity, too. Until that danger passes, I'm in command. You mustn't try to talk to Mrs. Carson to-night."

"You're taking a mighty big responsibility, doctor!"

There was a sharp tang of warning in the words and in their manner of utterance, but again the physician bowed gravely.

"I'm accepting it, Jim. This woman has been married a few days, and has seen her husband shot down. She's facing brain fever—perhaps lunacy—perhaps death. Unless she can rest now, she may never be able to help you. It's imperative."

For another moment of pause the two men stood measuring wills. Then the gaze of the officer wavered, and he raised one hand in a gesture of surrender.

"I don't know as I can override you," he admitted. "I've tried to do my duty as I see it. Like as not you're letting the criminal escape."

"I take that chance, too, Jim."

Dr. Merton pressed his needle to the stained arm, and, rising, spoke authoritatively to Kayami.

"Carry her to her bed. Is there a woman about? Yes? Well, have her undressed. I'll go to her presently."

Then he turned afresh to the figure over which the eternal issue hung in tremulous doubt.

XXV

ACCEPTING the inevitable, the deputy sheriff contented himself that evening with questioning the servants, none of whom was able to help him.

Kayami told his story of events in a clear-cut and convincing way, but he volunteered nothing further. Until his master could speak, he meant to be discreet as well as faithful. He had served dinner, he said. Mr. and Mrs. Carson had strolled about the grounds together. From his place in the pantry he had heard the report, and thought it a back-fire from the garage. Then calls for help had summoned him, and graphically he reacted the horrifying scene that had met his eye.

After sounding the alarm, he had on his own responsibility telephoned messages to be relayed by telegraph to Mr. Carson's office, to his brother in Kentucky, and to Mrs. Carson's family. Beyond this he knew nothing.

In his barn, companioned only by grim thoughts, sat the man whose feather-light touch on his trigger had launched this avalanche of tragic sequences.

He had come, never doubting the righteousness of his call. He had acted—and now, faced by an outcome that he had not anticipated, he was spending a night of misery. He had planned to perform his duty as an executioner, and, having performed it, to walk openly and unhesitantly to the nearest place where an officer of the law held jurisdiction and give himself over to custody.

He had not meant to shoot and run, but he had meant to shoot and kill, and he had not killed. When he had emerged from his ambushade and looked on the prostrate figure of his victim, he had seen the eyes open and flash upon him a challenge of deathless fury. In those eyes had burned the "borrowed fire" that is not lightly kindled or suffered to die, and old Lloyd knew that fire when he saw it. It meant that the story was not yet ended.

He gazed wonderingly at his rifle, as if it was a living ally that had betrayed him.

"I didn't nuver 'low thet old rifle-gun would fail me no sich fashion es thet," he mused somberly. "Folks used ter brag thet whenever I sighted over hit, I allays got me money or meat!"

He wrapped the gun in its coverings and hid it away again. As he sat there alone, with his coat discarded, the caution of the feudist still declared itself, for under the unbuttoned vest bulged the armpit holster with its heavy-calibered revolver. Without that Lloyd would not have felt himself fully clothed.

"I kain't betake me ter the high sheriff an' give myself up now," he meditated despondently, "bekase I hain't got no sure way of knowin' my job's finished yit. I come ter sot her free, and I hain't compassed nothin' save only ter inflict torture—an' fail." He paused, and a cold sweat stood out on his temples. "I needs must hide out an' tarry twell I knows what else ter do," he concluded. "I'm plumb obleeged ter tarry an' bide my time a spell, an' ter pray fer guidance fer my footsteps. I'm jest plumb obleeged!"

Lying there in the bed to which she had no memory of being carried, Phyllis Carson had opened her eyes on the morning after the ghastly night of the shooting. She opened them with a sense of dizzy unreality, and closed them again quickly, as the subdued light stabbed painfully into them.

All effort seemed onerous—even the effort to think; and so strange a physical and nervous languor lay over her that she guiltily postponed the ordeal. That guilt was only fanciful, for it was the opiate which still held her. After a little while she parted her lids halfway, and between the quietly swaying curtains of her window saw a little rim of green treetops and a patch of tenderly blue morning sky, across which drifted a single gull.

It was a new day, and that sky was not a sunrise sky, but one of a more advanced hour, of strong light, of resumed life.

Resumed life! Suddenly, like an awful scroll dizzily unrolling before her, there flashed the whole hideous summary that stood for yesterday and last night. She sat bolt upright in her bed, with eyes dilated in the horror of memory. For hours—hours that had bulwarked her reason against collapse, they had kept her here, sleeping like a baby in its untroubled crib, while the disasters they had made her for-

get might have come to their climax with death just beyond that door.

That was her husband's door, giving communication between their rooms, and behind it was a terrifying silence. It was a door which, as she remembered now, had never been opened in welcome from her side, and had never swung back from his, in violation of her tacit edict. What did it hide from her this morning?

She threw the covers down and thrust her bare feet into slippers. On a couch under the window lay Martha, her maid, in a flamboyant lilac kimono. The serving woman had been left there on watch, and now, as she slept heavily, her disordered hair and flushed face wore the demoralized stamp of a slatternly exhaustion.

Phyllis looked down, surprised that amid these portentous matters she could notice such a trifle as the change made by disheveled fatigue in the maid, who was usually neat and insipidly pretty.

But more vital things challenged her. Pausing to steady herself, and to brush away the mists that the drug had left in her brain, she threw a dressing gown over her shoulders and walked to her wide-open window, to drink, like a needed tonic, the freshness of the morning air. Unlike the maid, though she had been through a far sterner trial, her slenderer and finer beauty had not been defaced into ugliness. Her eyes were smudged with dark rings, but these seemed only to underscore the twin circles of vivid iris with the touch of pathos. The pallor of her rounded cheek made lovelier the fineness of its contour and the undulled luster of the dark, abundant hair.

As she stood at the window during that moment of pause, bracing herself to face the questions that remained unanswered beyond the door, her hand nervously caught at the curtain and crushed it in fresh panic.

There in the drive, where it had been all night, still stood the doctor's car. It would indicate that death still stood at bay and unvictorious, but it proclaimed, too, that death still attacked. It was not the sight of the car, however, that closed her fingers convulsively on the curtain. It was another discovery, and the train of thought which that discovery launched into a marching quickstep.

Down there on the lawn by the terrace a heavy figure was walking slowly up and down, chewing an unlighted cigar. As she looked at it, the man paused, to draw out

and inspect his watch with an air of restive impatience, of decorously restrained haste.

Last night Phyllis had not even recognized the presence of Jim Eldredge, the deputy sheriff. Now she knew him, and knew why he was there. Several times, when she and Dick had come here before their marriage on trips of planning and preparation, they had chatted pleasantly enough with him in the village. They had thought him, in so peaceful a community, as needless as a town crier.

This morning, as he paced sentinel-like before the door, he no longer wore the careless aspect of a man who had come to chat pleasantly. He seemed weighted with a serious duty.

With the first clear glimpse of wakefulness, Phyllis had remembered, and had been harrowed by the thought of what had shone out of Dick's eyes when they opened there at the edge of the pines.

Now again she heard his faint but scorching anathema:

"Laughing—while I die!"

It was as if an actual whisper stole again through her ears to her heart, and hurt it anew.

"I mean to live—until I punish you! Then I can die—not till then."

Perhaps last night, while she slept, the man whose faith she had lost had made a dying statement. Perhaps he had even sworn to it. This morning she might be an outcast in her own house, a criminal whom that officer was waiting to arrest and accuse of murder—waiting only in the decent patience of one who would yield the physician his hour before the law claimed its own.

That in itself didn't so much matter. It was not fear of imprisonment, or even of public disgrace, that made her knees tremble as she stood there, with the stertorous breathing of the sleeping maid in her ears. It was the thought that if they took her away, *he* might die here alone. If he did, she would never have the chance to convince him of her innocence. That was the thing which was now supremely important.

Perhaps, if he died, he would know. Perhaps, if his spirit passed to the widened life that brooks no misunderstanding, he would realize that she had never betrayed him. He might even, from that vast and passionless perspective, realize that old Lloyd himself had obeyed a perverted conviction, a warped concept of virtue.

But these enigmas must be faced and

solved. It was as if a sphinx guarded that door only a few feet away—a sphinx whose silence she must break. She knew that she was guiltless, and yet, by some tyranny of psychic law, she felt that unless she stood shriven in Dick's understanding her essential innocence was a thing no better than guilt.

Slowly and with burdensome effort, because even now she struggled against an obsession of physical lethargy, she moved to the threshold and turned the knob. It did not give to her touch, and a fresh pang caught her as she remembered that it had been her custom to keep that door fastened.

"I needn't have done that," she breathed in penitence, as she shot back the bolt and noiselessly let herself into the room, where the blinds were drawn, so that at first she seemed entering into utter darkness.

By the bed, upon which she could make out only a low mound of unmoving covers, was a figure in the stiff and immaculate white of a nurse's uniform. More nearly facing her, in a straight-backed chair, sat Dr. Merton, his chin cradled on his hand, his elbow on his knee, and his eyes still watching the fourposter that had been his battlefield. His was a wearied figure of vigil long but unabated. Even at the quiet sound of Phyllis's entrance he rose, let a finger rest for a moment against his lips, and came toward her, to lead her back through the door which she had entered.

In her own room again, he dropped a hand on Martha's shoulder. When the girl roused up with a startled exclamation, he smiled reassuringly on her and dismissed her with a nod.

Now that they were left alone together, the wife whose few days of marriage had been only an armed truce sought to stiffen the fibers of her soul for a supreme ordeal. Perhaps the doctor's expression would give her, before his words voiced it, some indication of her own standing under that roof—some intimation whether he thought of her as a sorrowing wife or as a denounced and unmasked conspirator.

She watched eagerly to see whether he brought her sympathy or scornful condemnation. Much depended on that, for the physician held the portals of the sick room. Its doors were his to open and his to close.

Phyllis stood gasping—tremulously waiting. Questions rose and remained unshaped, but the face whose expression she sought to penetrate was noncommittal. It

showed only kindness and the gravity with which such a man might begin the breaking of any serious news. It told her nothing in advance of utterance.

"How—how is he?" It was all Phyllis could manage. Yet, having got so far, her restraint broke, and accusingly she added: "Last night, when he might have been dying, you put me to sleep!"

Dr. Merton laid a hand on her shoulder, and his voice was steady, soothing.

"Last night it was my fight," he answered; "but I knew that another and a longer fight was coming, when I'd need you. I tried to save you for that."

"It was my fight, too," she protested; "and I wasn't there!"

"Last night," went on Merton, in that same tone of solacing reserve and strength, "your eyes told me that you had already suffered enough. If I hadn't done just what I did, you might have broken down; and for what lay ahead I needed you. Unless love fights for our patient, he can't win through."

"Will—he—will he—win through?"

"That's a question I can't answer yet. You accuse me of not letting you fight. Very well, this morning I'm calling on you to fight. I'm not sparing you. I'm leaning on you as an ally; and an ally must know all the facts."

"Tell them to me," she said simply.

Merton nodded his head.

"Mr. Carson was shot through the left breast," he began. "The bullet ranged upward, narrowly missing the heart, and penetrating the lung. Last night we fought only the shock of the wound. When I reached him, life seemed gone."

He paused. Phyllis waited, hanging on his words with rapt absorption.

"But," resumed the physician, "our restoratives worked. Even then he seemed, for a time, to be slipping—constantly slipping downward and backward, toward death. His life was a thing that I couldn't seem to grasp and hold, but we won that issue. Now we face the other."

"What other?" she demanded.

"The usual consequence of such a wound is traumatic pneumonia," he told her. "The shock itself is past. Now he can sleep a little. Soon that pierced lung will become congested and solidify. He won't sleep much then, or talk. He'll fight for breath, with constant pain, and in delirium. For about nine days he'll be passing through

the three general stages that must come and go before the crisis. That's when I shall need you."

"I'll be here," she said, so artlessly that the very quiet of her tone was like an oath of allegiance. "Has he talked yet?"

"Not yet. I've wanted him to sleep while he could; but—" The doctor broke off. His eyes clouded with something like anxiety as he added: "I'm afraid I must let him talk a little this morning, when he wakes."

"Why do you say 'afraid'?"

"Because it may excite him." Once more the physician hesitated. "None of us knows how this shooting happened," he went on. "Last night Jim Eldredge, the sheriff's deputy, wanted to ask you questions. I held him off. I had a life and death fight on my hands just then, and I assumed full responsibility; but this is another day, and the law is still the law."

"You mean—"

"I mean that I can no longer block its right of way. We must be prudent, and prudence requires admitting the possibility of Mr. Carson's death. If this case proves to be murder, the law demands an *ante mortem* statement. This morning I must let Eldredge ask his questions."

"You mean—ask me?"

Merton shook his head.

"That can wait," he said. "You'll be here. It's the questioning of the patient that must be done at once—while he can still talk."

For an instant Phyllis wanted to cry out in dissent. She wanted to claim her right of seeing him first, and seeking to win back his faith, before he told his accusing story to others. She wanted her chance, her fighting chance; but how could she tell them that without telling everything?

For a moment she stood irresolute, in such throes of panic as her elastic courage did not often admit. Then she fought down her fears and held them hidden behind the pale composure of her face.

Even to Dick she couldn't go as a beggar for mercy. If she could ever convince him of her innocence, it must not be in a frenzied effort to stave off exposure of the infamy he attributed to her. He had his right to speak, when he stood face to face with death. He must be his own judge of truth and falsity.

"Can I see him first?" she inquired faintly, but the request bore no urge of in-

sistency. She felt that she must face this issue as it came, accepting the cards of fate as they fell.

Dr. Merton laid a gentle hand on her arm.

"If you insist, as your right," he acceded; "but I've kept Eldredge waiting a long while, and for the patient's sake I want him to have the thing over with as soon as he wakes. Talking to you, afterward, won't hurt him. Happiness isn't a poison, but a sound medicine."

Phyllis nodded her head slowly, while the unconscious irony of his words bit into her like an acid.

"All right!" she whispered. "As you say."

"There's the nurse now, Mrs. Carson," the doctor said. "That probably means that our patient is awake. Will you send for Eldredge? Keep him in the hall until I call you both in."

With the sense of one being dispatched to bring in her own executioner, Phyllis went to the stairhead and beckoned to Kayami, who was standing below with a dusting cloth in an idle hand. Perhaps it was the imagination of her overwrought nerves, but it seemed to her that as the man looked up, his dark, narrow eyes lighted into a hostile suspicion—almost into a glitter of hatred. Once, in the old days, she had smilingly told her fiancé that his servant was jealous of her, and Dick had laughed with genuine amusement.

"It's something to have a servant who cares enough to be jealous, these days," he had said.

She had agreed, feeling as if her lover had a bodyguard as well as a body servant. Now she was calling together a court which might in a few minutes condemn and banish her, or even worse. That sinister glance seemed an evil augury; but with a quiet dignity she gave her order.

"Kayami, please bring Mr. Eldredge up here."

Then she waited, trying to control the nervousness that stretched the seconds to hours of foreboding. At last she found herself bowing to the representative of the law, who came up the stairs with an embarrassment that proclaimed itself in his whole bearing.

"I shouldn't come trampling in on your anxiety and sorrow like this, ma'am, if I could help it," she heard him saying defensively, and in the kindly tone that she

remembered from the past; "but I don't know as I have any choice."

He still had no suspicion that involved her, she reflected. She wondered what change would come over his manner in the course of the next few minutes, when the voice from the pillow had spoken; but she only smiled wanly and waited. She thought she knew how Marie Antoinette had felt as she sought to carry her chin high in the tumbril. Marie Antoinette had faced only the blade of a changing order, but she was to be stripped naked in an infamy which she had not earned.

"Mr. Carson is ready," came the quiet announcement of the physician's voice from the doorway.

Phyllis found herself leading the officer of the law into the presence of the man whose eyes, when she had last looked into them, had vindictively charged her with treason and murder.

XXVI

INSIDE the room Phyllis paused irresolutely near the door. It seemed to her that she dared not approach the bed upon which her husband lay, unless he summoned her. Without his permission she could not take her place beside him as his wife, but must stand aloof as the accused.

This was a court room, and her place was in the dock. That other woman in starched white, whom he had never seen before, might bend authoritatively over his bed and issue orders second in sanction only to the doctor's; but Phyllis Carson must stand and wait. She stood there with her lip between her teeth, ghost pale, and pilloried in torture.

For a brief interval she dared not even meet Dick's eyes. If she were to encounter in them any triumph of reprisal, any sign of the vindictiveness that she had seen there on the previous night, she must, despite all the need of calm, shriek out and lose her hold on sanity.

But it was only for a moment that this cowardice prevailed. Then she looked steadily, and saw that the face on the pillow was calm. If Dick purposed to hurl against her a bolt of destruction before this audience, he meant to reserve its launching for some dramatic instant of his own choosing. His pale features were those of a man who confronts the possibility of death calmly and without excitement. They were features of unaffrighted dignity.

"Mr. Carson," began Dr. Merton, "the cause of your injury is an untold story yet. Last night you couldn't talk, and your wife was prostrated. We hope to pull you through, but all eventualities must be met. Mr. Eldredge is here as the spokesman of the law. He wants a statement from you. I have told him that he must put his questions in such form that you can nod or shake your head in answer."

The wounded man raised his brows inquiringly, and Merton went on.

"Eldredge can write down and read to you the result of his interview, and you can touch the pen with which your signature is added to your statement. You mustn't tax yourself unduly, and I understand that that procedure meets the requirements of law."

So introduced, the deputy sheriff came awkwardly forward. Biting back a moan of agonized suspense, Phyllis moved a step nearer and stood by the foot of the four-poster.

"Mr. Carson," began Eldredge, the constraint of his embarrassment making him blunt, "from what we can gather, somebody shot you down last night in an effort to murder you. Is there any enemy that you suspect?"

For a long moment the face on the pillow gave no answer by expression or gesture. Phyllis's hands gripped the woodwork at the foot of the bed. She had to grasp it for support, or fall. Now surely he would launch his accusing bolt—or would he still hold her for another eternity in an agony of suspense?

His eyes strayed to hers, met them, and almost seemed to smile, but with so faint and doubtful a play of expression and light in their pupils that she could not be sure.

Again the suspended silence held until Eldredge repeated:

"Do you suspect any one?"

Then, slowly but firmly Carson, shook his head. The gesture was undeniable in negation.

Suddenly Phyllis's knees became as weak as water, and the room spun about her in a madman's whirligig; but she knew that she was standing steady, and that her features had not outwardly changed.

"You were shot by some one—some one with a motive of enmity, weren't you?"

Before he answered, Carson beckoned with weak fingers to his wife. She came haltingly, in obedience to the summons,

with the sickened feeling that he was drawing her to the center of the stage for the great moment of exposure—that he was accentuating the effect of the climax he had cunningly devised. Perhaps he meant to call on her to testify, and to draw her into what he believed to be further perjury. If so, she would tell them the whole story, concealing nothing and sparing no one—though she knew that they would believe it no more than he.

It required what seemed a superhuman effort to move around the bed into a shaft of sunlight that fell searchingly on her. When she reached the place, Carson raised his hand and took hers into it. Then, slowly and painfully, but with steadiness and directness, he said:

"No one shot me. It was an—accident. My own gun—went off."

"Your own gun!" For once the sheriff's kindly voice was almost gruff in its incredulous contradiction. "Mrs. Carson didn't tell us that!"

"Mrs. Carson," quickly interpolated Dr. Merton, "has told us nothing yet. She's had no chance."

"She didn't see," went on the weak but firm voice from the pillow. "Her back was turned."

It seemed to Phyllis that the weight of solar systems had been lifted from her soul. Richard Carson was perjuring himself in the teeth of death to shield her. If he was doing that, it must be a thing prompted and actuated by love. If he loved her, surely there was hope that she could win back his faith.

"Write that down," commanded Carson. "Let me swear to it."

It seemed an interminable time of bootless formality before they left the room. Then, as she sought to linger, the doctor sent her out with the others, saying in a low voice:

"You can come back presently. Leave him for a moment."

Hardly knowing what she did, she followed the officer down the stairs. He turned at the foot, to inquire:

"Mrs. Carson, have you anything to add to his statement that it was the accidental discharge of his own gun?"

As Eldredge spoke, Phyllis saw a figure standing just inside the door, and recognized Lawrence Speed.

"Nothing to add," she heard herself replying in a far-away voice.

As the deputy left, she found Speed grasping both her hands.

"I came to inquire, and to express my sorrow," he said. "What I just heard has taken a load off my mind!"

She was eager to go back to the sick room, to throw herself on her knees at her husband's bedside, and to express her gratitude for his unexpected generosity.

"Load off your mind?" she repeated vaguely.

"Why, yes, naturally." Speed hastened to explain. "In the first place, I'm vastly relieved to learn that Mr. Carson has done so well so far. In the second"—he paused, then hurried along in an embarrassed fashion—"well, you know, all sorts of wild stories were floating around the neighborhood—mysterious assassination and that sort of thing."

"I see!"

"Yes, and in that connection I couldn't help thinking of my old mountaineer." Again Speed broke off, and waved his hand, which held an unlighted pipe. "You see, he comes from a land of feudal warfare and shooting from ambush, and what I heard of this affair reminded me of him. It wasn't a thing that fitted Cape Cod; but if it was an accident—"

"Yes," Phyllis said dully. "It was an accident."

"Thank God, for old *Leatherstocking's* sake!" he breathed fervently. "It might have been an ugly circumstantial case against him, and I liked the fellow."

"Please don't speak of this, Mr. Speed," Phyllis begged. "Don't speak of it to any one. When such rumors get abroad, they always die hard, and—"

"I understand," he hastened to assure her. "I will be careful not to mention it until your husband is well enough to laugh over it with us. He'll appreciate it then, I dare say."

"Yes," she echoed, "I dare say he will."

The tension of being detained by this man, whose love of talk for talk's sake led him on like the *Ancient Mariner*, was intolerable. Phyllis wondered how, even in less stressful circumstances, she had found his garrulous companionship endurable.

Once before his prattling tongue had brought warning—a warning which, had she played out her part a little longer, would have averted catastrophe. Now again Lawrence Speed turned her thoughts in a new direction—for suddenly she real-

ized that she, too, must think about Lloyd Powell.

Where was the old mountaineer now, and what was her duty in relation to him?

In the strange revulsion of her present attitude, a wave of hatred for the foolish meddler swept her. For the moment she could see in him only the author of inexpressible misery. She had undertaken to free him from the living death of prison, and she had ended by setting at liberty a homicidal maniac. Yet he had done what he had done for one reason only—the warped passion of serving her without counting the cost. Unwittingly she had herself given him his signal, after he had shown by his first forbearance that he stood amenable to her wishes.

The ghastliness of his mistake was unspeakable; but it had been an honest mistake, and one which she alone in the world could understand.

What end, after all, could be served by the punishment of an old man who had taken the chance of paying with his life for what his warped mentality regarded as a debt of gratitude? It had been a hideous deed, and yet perhaps Omniscience could recognize in its self-sacrificing motive something of fundamental beauty.

In a way Phyllis was responsible for the strange old lunatic. To him it had been as if she had called on him—she who would have died to forestall his act of destruction. So far no one had suspected him, except Dick and this visitor. There might be no reason for others suspecting him at all, unless she spoke the word that would inevitably lead to his undoing.

If Dick lost his fight with death, would he rest easier for her speaking that word? She thought not.

Unless the law tracked him down, she was for giving Lloyd Powell his chance of escape; but she must never see him. She must not have to look into the eyes which had sighted that murderous gun, however deep the devotion that they held for her.

A sudden fear caught her—the fear that the sublime old idiot would try to see her before he left. An inward shudder shook her. She seemed to see again the gaunt figure in the twilight, with the rifle cradled in its elbow.

Of course, she had even now no positive knowledge of his guilt. Unlike her husband, she had not actually glimpsed him last night; yet to urge that excuse to her-

self was a mendacious quibble. Almost as certainly as if she had seen him fire his shot, she *knew* that he had fired it.

She had just declared to herself that she must never see him; but suddenly she realized that she must do so—that it was imperatively necessary. How could she know that he would not boldly give himself into custody and state the facts? If he stated the facts, the whole splendid generosity of Dick's perjury was wasted and confounded.

Or, if he did not do that, how could she feel assured that he would not stay to crown with final success the attempt which had failed last night? Such conduct would be true to the character he had shown. Phyllis trembled at the thought.

"You are chilly," Speed said. "The nervous strain on you has been terrific."

"Yes," she murmured.

She was torturing herself with the problem of getting a message to Lloyd Powell in secrecy. She was weighing the possibility of using this man as a messenger, and as swiftly discarding it as impracticable. He talked too much. She would telegraph to Cullom Bowes, whom she could trust.

"Yes," she repeated. "You must excuse me now. I must go to Dick."

Speed had gone at last, and Phyllis was again upstairs. Once more she opened the door of her husband's room. When she did so, the nurse rose and left it. The doctor had already gone.

Halting just inside the threshold, she stood for a moment with her hands at her bosom. Then, timidly and half suppliantly, she moved toward him. His lids had been lowered, but now he lifted them and glanced about the room, to see that it was empty, except for themselves.

Instantly there leaped into his eyes the blistering, unmitigated hate that she had seen in them last night. Unprepared for it, Phyllis closed her own as against an insufferable glare. She flinched back, halting blindly, as infantry advancing over a seemingly safe terrain might halt in shattered confusion under the devastation of an unsuspected barrage.

His eyes spurted withering abhorrence, and his lips twisted themselves again into a bitter irony.

"Judas woman!" he flung at her, in low-voiced intensity. "Judas woman!"

"But—but," she stammered, as she caught at the bed's foot, "you told them—"

"I told them a lie!" His weak voice cut like a sword blade. "That lie was for them, because our quarrel is our own!"

His hands clenched themselves, and as she groped her way toward the door, as if scourged from his presence, his lips spoke again the two words:

"Judas woman!"

XXVII

JOE CARSON left Peril Town soon after he wrote his letter to his brother. He went on muleback, because he was to inspect some coal and timber prospects in a country that lay thirty miles from a railroad. The journey would consume several days at the least, and for that period he would be beyond contact with either mail or telegraph wire.

Joe welcomed these occasional sallies into the wilderness, where a man seemed to cut the hawsers that bound life to civilization, and dropped back a hundred years or more, into a sturdier age. He was living again the life of pioneer forefathers. Something in his blood sang like the responses of a litany when he heard ancient ballads intoned about smoky hearths in windowless log houses.

From misty sunrise until the fires of sunset glowed behind the western peaks, he rode along creek bed trails where one must know the quicksands, and over fordings which a sudden torrent of rain sometimes converted into a whirlpool racing saddle-high. It was as if the prose in which life wrote itself at other times became a closed volume, and in its place was opened a book of crude but valiant poetry—the poetry of saga and legend. The land in these high places cast off thrifty reserve, to become magnificent and profligate in scope and color. One thought and dreamed as broadly as the eye swung its course or the eagle soared.

At length Carson finished his work of inspecting certain possibilities of development in a land where the creeks "turkey-tailed" out to their headwaters, and where the laurel and rhododendron grew in tangles which the bear could hardly penetrate. Then he turned back for the trip out to the margin of civilization. As he went, he seemed to be traveling down a slope not of leagues only, but of human generations from the American Revolution to the world war.

Just before he reached Peril Town, his

wearily shambling mount cast a shoe—or, in the parlance of the place, "flung a mule iron." He determined to unsaddle at the first house, to rest his lamed beast before going on.

He was thinking of Dick as he rode at leisurely pace along a shaly creek bed that sparkled between overhanging thickets of laurel and hardwood. He was seeing again the house to which, on the day before the wedding, his brother had taken him for an inspection. There was a certain pleasure in contrasting that Cape Cod country with this, and in comparing the widely variant environments. They were as far apart in character as Jubal and Tubal-cain; and yet in each of them lived an Anglo-Saxon people unalloyed by foreign blood, and in each of them lingered strongly the savor of America's beginnings.

Then, as the creek turned sharply and came out upon a strip of level gravel, he saw a wretched house ahead, hideously disfigured by the gaudy coloring of door and window frames against unpainted clapboards. As he looked, the man started in his saddle and jerked at his reins in the sheer surprise that a trivial thing had aroused.

The house boasted no decent barn, but a ramshackle structure of the sort known in the hills as a "pole house" served in lieu of a better stable. It was built of slender logs laid crosswise, like a pig pen, with the gaps unchinked. On its ridgepole, whirling in the gusty breeze that eddied around the shoulder of a hill, spun the arms of a small toy windmill and weather vane, gay in the vermilion, white, and green of fresh paint. Joe Carson was startled when he saw it, because he realized that these miniature windmills belong as exclusively to Cape Cod as the sterling stamp belongs to silver.

He did not happen to know who dwelt in this untidy habitation; but as he drew near, a lank, shiftless-looking man lounged into the doorway and nodded slothfully to the traveler.

"Howdy, stranger?" he hailed affably. "Light down and hitch your critter."

Carson threw his leg over the pommel and tied the mule to a rotting hitching post by the stile. Then, in accordance with the ways of the country, he gave his name and his business, since strangers are not considered either courteous or welcome who fail of such candor.

"I've done heard tell of ye," declared the man, lounging forward. "Ye're the same Carson that penitentiariated my pap-in-law, Lloyd Powell; but I've done heard him 'low that he didn't grudge ye none fer doin' what they hired ye ter do. Ef he don't disgust ye, I reckon I'm licensed ter feel friendly myself."

"I hope so," laughed Carson. "A lawyer must serve his client."

He ungirthed. Then, as he threw the saddle down, he pointed to the shed.

"I was looking at that windmill you've got up there on the ridgepole," he said. "I've never seen those things before except on Cape Cod, and that's a longish way from here."

"Thet?" inquired the man indifferently, stuffing crumbs of leaf tobacco into his mouth. "Thet's some sort of a contraption thet my pap-in-law sent ter the children. I hain't got no manner of knowin' whar at he boughten hit."

"You mean Lloyd Powell?" inquired the traveler.

Melissa's husband nodded.

"Lloyd Powell—he's my pap-in-law," he affirmed. "He done come back from down below in Frankfort hyar a leetle spell back, an' he straightway up and sot out ergin. He 'lowed he aimed ter travel erbout an' hev a look at the world afore he died. Myself, I think he's a dinged old fool ter fare off thetaway at his decrepid time of life!"

Carson laughed.

"I expect the old man wants to make up for lost opportunity," he suggested. "There wasn't much to see in Frankfort. Where did he go?"

"Kain't tell ye thet," came the drawling response, accompanied by a loose-jointed shrug. "He just up an' off an' went. We hain't hed nairy word from him, save only thet yestiddy thet play-toy come in the mail fer the kids, an' Melissy 'lowed the bundle war backed in his handwrite."

The sunset was red behind the shallows of the river when Joe Carson, with his saddlebags over his arm, came into the hotel at Peril Town, and took from the clerk a number of letters and telegrams.

"Some of these things have been layin' here several days, Mr. Carson," volunteered the man behind the desk.

Carson nodded. He was more interested in the prospect of a bath and a shave, just then, than in matters of business.

As chance dictated, he was stripped for the tub before he spread flat and read the last telegraph slip. It briefly announced:

Mr. Dick shot to-night.—KAYAMI.

Joe Carson read the message again. For all his ingrained mastery over his emotions, a stifled outcry broke from his throat.

"No, it can't be true!" he exclaimed, as if trying to beat down a fact with the vehemence of contradiction. "My God! No, it's impossible!"

He dropped into a chair and covered his face with hands whose finger nails left deep marks upon his temples. After a time he rose and stood straight. He was quiet now, with a deadly stillness of both nerve and muscle, but his face was chalk pale.

"If it's true," he said, half aloud, and in such a tone as a man might use for the administering of some most solemn oath, "if it's true, and he dies, his murderer shall pay—not in any court of law strangled with red tape, but to me, and with death. So help me Almighty God!"

As he hastily threw on his clothes again, he caught a reflection from the mirror over the dressing table, and was startled to see looking out at him a man of such rigidly set and colorless features.

"The windmill!" he exclaimed in a voice of discovery. "Lloyd Powell went to Cape Cod. Dick has been shot. Perhaps he's dead by now!"

Ten minutes later Joe Carson stood in the telegraph office. His voice and his manner were as steady, incisive, and compelling as if he were in a court room, examining a witness under oath.

"I want to see any messages that have gone out from here in the last ten days signed by Lloyd Powell, or that have come in here for him," he commanded.

With fingers that he held steady with a conscious effort, he received the two telegrams that the old man had sent to Phyllis, voicing his gratitude for his liberty.

"That's all. He didn't receive any, and I never saw him but once in my life," asserted the operator emphatically. "That was the day he came in here and dictated these two telegrams to me."

"What else do you remember about him? Did he talk?"

The operator shook his head.

"No, that's all there was to it," he answered thoughtfully. Then he added, as if it were almost of too little consequence

to deserve mention: "Except that I asked him to carry a telegram over to the courthouse to you."

"A telegram to me?"

"Yes—I think it was signed 'Carson.' I remember noticing that the surnames of the sender and the addressee were the same."

Joe Carson's eyes were glittering in intense concentration.

"I want you to think carefully," he told the operator. "I received two telegrams from my brother that day. Was it the first or the second that you gave to this man Lloyd Powell?"

"It must have been the first," came the immediate answer. "Don't you remember that I handed you the second one myself, late in the afternoon?"

"Thank you. That's all."

Carson had learned enough. He turned sharply on his heel and hurried back to the hotel. As he walked, he plunged into another pedestrian, but was so abstracted that he did not realize doing so, and did not pause to make apology.

The facts seemed to connect themselves, link by link, into an unbreakable chain of circumstantial evidence—the toy windmill that could have come only from Cape Cod; the telegrams which Lloyd had sent, and the one which presumably he had read; yet behind and above old Powell, in Joe Carson's mind, stood another and a more important figure. That thought took shape more slowly, because at first its enormity threw over it the clouding of unreason. It was so monstrous as to be almost unbelievable—and yet more and more it grew into an inevitable conclusion.

The old feudist, fresh from his prison term, was to be dealt with as some mad dog might be dealt with. He deserved no mercy, and no mercy should he receive; but when he had paid his debt the score of reprisal would only be begun. He was, after all, only a jackal reacting to a warped devotion, and actuated by no motive more personal with himself than the influence of another.

Lloyd must die, but the full volume of the brother's fury was reserved for the personality in the background—one who could so play on an old gun-fighter's susceptible emotions as to make a catspaw and assassin of him. The whole artillery of his wrath turned on the woman who, reared to the fastidious niceties of civilization, presum-

ably guided by enlightened ethics, seemed to have struck back to the murderous treachery of her ancestors—the woman whom Richard Carson had married!

XXVIII

THE telegram said only that Joe had been shot. It was a message sent by a servant, but of that servant Joe Carson knew something both by hearsay and observation. Kayami was devoted to his employer, and his signature at the end of the brief communication connoted things that were of vital import.

One might have expected that such a staggering piece of news would come signed by the wife of the wounded man. It had not so come, and upon this circumstance Joe had not failed to ponder, even in his rush of thinking.

Kayami had wired, and had wired to him, because Kayami's loyalty to Dick had stretched out its grasp to Dick's next of blood. Had he been acting for his mistress, he would punctiliously have signed her name. The fact that he had used his own instead must be accepted as significant.

It could only mean that the message came from Kayami, and from Kayami alone. Its very reticence seemed to intimate circumstances which could be told only in confidence, and to exclude Dick Carson's wife from that confidence.

Joe did not mean to telegraph his condolences or the announcement of his coming. Already he had convicted Phyllis, and he meant to enter her house unheralded so soon as trains could set him down in its neighborhood. His purpose was to make his entrance without any warning which might give her opportunity to cover the tracks of her perfidious conduct.

The whole gist and essence of the shocking news lay in that one word "shot." Already the skeleton of Joe Carson's theory had been constructed and articulated, as are the bone structures of long extinct mammals from a single bit of osseous tissue. It shaped itself into a plot inspired by Phyllis Carson and executed by Lloyd Powell.

If Lloyd Powell had been the active agent, then the word "shot" and the word "killed" might be regarded as synonyms. Lloyd Powell didn't miss his shots.

So Joe indulged no hope of reaching a brother still able to speak to him and to resolve his doubts. In his own mind he thought of Dick as already dead. He was

not going as a companion or comforter of one injured, but as the avenger of one murdered, and he was going fast.

From Peril Town he could make a start only by broken travel on local trains, with wasted time at connection points. From Virginia, twenty miles distant, he could board the Eastern express, and save a day.

Across those twenty miles rose the steep backbone of a divide whose isolation had withstood the siege of generations. In that country one did not speak of crossing the ridge, but of "going in" and "coming out"—phrases which, the world over, mean entering or leaving a wilderness. Now Joe Carson meant to traverse those toilsome and perilous miles at a rate of speed which must needs be prodigious. He meant to break records—unless one of half a dozen possibilities stopped him.

As he was leaving the hotel, a man caught at his arm. When the hurrying traveler shook him impatiently off, and went out almost at a run, the man fell into step with him.

This interrupter was a gaunt-faced, sal-low old fellow, whose appearance proclaimed him a mountain lawyer of true backwoods type. He bore the name of Rat Ankle Cully, and he had more than once been associated in practice with Carson. He talked as fast as he walked, while his companion led the way to the livery stable where he meant to take horse.

"Jett Powell's back," announced the volunteer informer. "I thought you ought to be forewarned."

At another time the news would have brought Joe Carson up, halting and indignant. Now it scarcely registered on his mind.

"You remember Jett, don't you?" insisted the other.

Carson nodded. When he had convicted old Lloyd Powell, Jett should have been convicted too, and hanged. He was that infrequent type of mountain desperado whose presence in any community means turbulence—a killer without shame and without conscience, yet of such prowess that behind him stood his clan. Jett had left the mountains, and his departure had been celebrated like the passing of a pestilence. He had pledged himself never to return, and a peace had been patched up between the Wileys and the Powells based largely on that agreement.

Now Jett was back.

"He's wearied of the flat country out West," went on Rat Ankle. "He's come back. He says there'll be blood-letting if he's crossed, an' folks tell it that back on the mountain he's already stirrin' up the wilder spirits. Hell's broth's a b'ilin' there, Joe, an' folks is fearful the war 'll be on again."

They had reached the door of the livery stable. The old lawyer held Carson's arm, and dropped his voice.

"He's been makin' threats against you in particular, Joe," he cautioned. "He knows you have his signed pledge to stay away, and if he sees you—unless you see him first—he'll get you. Above all, don't go into the country over the mountain. The hornets are swarming over there just now along them little turkey-tail creeks."

"Thanks," said Carson quietly. "I'll bear it in mind."

That was the country he was crossing to-night—a country which was a Powell stronghold, peopled along its every road not only by hostile clansmen, but by the ruder and more illiterate elements of the clan. Somewhere between him and his objective, Jett Powell, the Mad Mullah of their passions, was inciting them to renewed hate. Carson must pass between them and among them, riding moonlit ways too rapidly for caution. The sound of his horse's hoofs would go ahead of him in the stillness. Hostile eyes and guns could command him from the impenetrable cover of continuous "laurel hells."

Joe Carson did not hire his horse that night. He bought it outright, for he knew what lay before him, and he knew that no horse could stand it and survive. He was by nature a merciful man, who always cared for his mount as for himself, but to-night he was sparing neither. He meant to ride the animal to death, and then go on by foot.

Those creek bed roads were shaly strips of peril, worn hub-deep by decades of straining wagon wheels, and slippery with water and mud. Joe Carson's mount took them at a pell-mell gallop. When for a little way the patch stretched smooth and sandy, he went at a full run that flecked him with spume and made him reek with sweat.

Up steep grades, where he would usually have dismounted and walked, Carson urged his beast to exhaustion. He scorned detours that avoided quicksands and earth

slides. Horse and rider were all for the straightest line to-night, with all its chances.

Joe had seen a man look sharply at him as he turned out of the town into the hill road, and had seen the fellow turn away. He knew that the clansman would telephone ahead, and that in all likelihood word was going in advance of him that he was on his way.

He was utterly in the hands of his enemies, and he knew it. They would glower and let him pass, or they would shoot and stretch him dead. It depended on how far Jett Powell's incitements had gone as yet. The wiser heads of the clan would seek to keep the peace. Old and patriarchal men would plead and counsel. Hot-heads would argue, too, but the chances were that the eruption would not break just yet. First it would simmer and rumble.

Jett was for an instantly upflaring feud, because only in the heat and passion of its waging could he hope to break his exile. To-night it might still be possible for a Wiley to pass through the swarm of the hornets unscathed.

A storm broke and lashed the hills with its furious cannonading. Trickling streams woke and raged into torrents. Fords that had been shallow had to be risked and breasted. At last the horse, with blood on its nostrils and stumbling legs, went down and could not rise. Joe Carson paused to end its sufferings with a revolver shot. From now on he must, in mountain parlance, "man-power his way along an' heft his luggage on his own withers."

At last, stumbling himself, exhausted, but alive and with set face, Joe Carson caught his train.

(To be continued in the January number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

DREAMS AND THE DUST

DREAMS and the dust—

Ah, tell me which is which!

Once I did know, but now I know no more;

For lo, this dream,

This girl, this ivory witch,

I knew as dust of yore.

Her eyelids were blown dust beneath my feet,

And dust these breasts of myrrh,

As gardens sweet,

Making soft moonlight as they rise and fall

With gentle stir.

Thousands of years ago

As desert sands,

Long ere her beauty's rose had learned to blow,

She drifted through my hands;

I dreaming naught of all this golden hair,

These marble limbs, some far day to be she;

Nor dreaming I should be her worshiper

When by a miracle that dust should be—

The dust that drifted through my finger tips—

On some far, flowering day

Should be her heart against my heart,

Her wild kiss on my lips,

I the proud lord of her from head to feet.

What thaumaturgic art

Thus raised her from the dust to be so sweet?

Yet no less strange

How on a sudden she shall one day change,

And I, with heart in twain,

Behold her dust again!

Richard Le Gallienne

Modern Mary

AND WHY SHE DID NOT GO TO SOUTH AMERICA WITH A
MARRIED MAN

By Mella Russell McCallum

MARY was translating a Brazilian order for malachite green. "Send fifteen pounds," her pencil flashed in shorthand. Suddenly she paused. Looking across the wide space full of clerks and stenographers, she could see that a stranger had come in and was shaking hands with the office manager.

"Good morning, Mr. Herrick," the stranger said.

Without being conscious of what she was doing, Mary rose. She was a slender, brown-haired girl of twenty-four, unrouged, with grave, dark blue eyes, and—according to office girl standards—poorly dressed; but her straight blue jersey was immaculate, likewise the flat round collar and cuffs of coarse white linen.

The office manager was replying heartily—a bit too heartily.

"Well, well, if it isn't Mr. King back! I'm glad to see you, sir. Your father said you'd be at your desk soon. You're looking fine, sir. The trip did wonders for you."

"Yes, I'm strong as a horse now," the stranger laughed.

Mary caught up her dictation pad and drifted in the direction of that laugh. It wasn't a big laugh, or unusual in any way; but there was something about it—

Halfway across the room consciousness returned—and, with it, self-consciousness. She had never done such a thing before.

"What on earth am I over here for?" she demanded.

She hurried back to her desk, thankful that the other girls were too busy craning their necks to notice her. She sat down, tingling all over.

"What possessed me? I never saw the man before. What made me get up and start toward him?"

The red-headed file clerk came along with information.

"Junior partner—old King's son. Been away for his health. Grand fellow. Has a lemon of a wife, they say. Ain't it a shame?"

Mary nodded. Usually Geraldine's chatter amused or disgusted her, according to her mood; but her mind, usually so fastidious, blotted in every word of this.

The file girl shifted her gum delicately and strolled back to duty.

"*A lemon of a wife—a lemon of a wife,*" wrote itself in Mary's brain.

The words depressed her. She shook herself.

"What utter nonsense! What is it to me if he has forty lemon wives?"

She opened a letter postmarked "Buenos Aires."

"Please quote your price on valerian root," she read.

Her pencil dashed down some furious curlicues. Then, without the least intention, she stood up again.

The junior partner was coming toward her. He was somewhere in the middle thirties—tall, rather delicately built, sea-bronzed, with deep-set gray eyes under graying, hard-brushed hair; not so much good-looking as nice-looking. He had a rather wide mouth with warring tendencies—a tendency to set in a straight line, and a tendency to relax whimsically. All this Mary took in instantly; also the fact that his gray eyes were fixed on her, as if in recognition.

The sense of depression lifted. She was suddenly at peace—a queer, active peace, as if she had been passively unhappy all her life until now.

Then self-consciousness and the present again. She realized that others were watch-

ing. Something told her that the man approaching had no business to transact with her. She must save him from embarrassment, somehow.

He came close to her desk.

"Yes?" she inquired calmly. "I'm the new translator, Miss Hamilton. I saw Mr. Herrick directing you to me."

It was a lie. He nodded curtly. No one but Mary knew that he was catching at a straw.

"Oh, yes," he said. "I've some letters I wish you'd go over. I don't like to trust my Spanish too far. I'm not supposed to do any work until to-morrow, but these are important."

He drew a small sheaf of envelopes from his pocket. As he laid them on her desk, he swayed just a trifle. She was glad the backs of the filing cabinets acted as a screen.

"I see!"

Mary's tone was brisk. She looked at the top superscription—"Mr. Brooks King." The handwriting was American, and the postmark "New York."

She examined the other two envelopes. One was postmarked "Albany," the other "Philadelphia."

"All right, Mr. King." Her voice was clear and cool. She was amazed at her facile wit. She knew Geraldine was listening. "I'll have them ready for you in a short time."

"Oh, no hurry—morning will do. Thank you, Miss Hamilton."

In the back of his eyes lay a smile. Mary knew that her eyes were smiling, too.

As he walked away, Geraldine's red head appeared.

"I'll say the trip cured him, all right! Who'd ever have thought he'd be on the job so quick? But that's him—awful thorough. You'll like him, Miss Hamilton. He's a prince to work for."

"Did his wife accompany him on his trip?"

How did she come to say that? She hated herself for it. Cheap curiosity was not one of her traits; but Geraldine accepted it as a correct "line."

"What—her go with him? Not so you'd notice it! Think she'd leave her society crowd to cruise around the tropics? Huh! Why, she thinks she's a regular Mrs. Astorbilt, and New Yawk society would languish without her!"

With ostentatious energy Mary took a

large, plain envelope from a drawer, and put the junior partner's letters into it. Geraldine's words, "You'll like him, Miss Hamilton," made her want to scream with laughter. *Like him!*

She ran a sheet of paper in her typewriter. Clack, clackety, clack! "Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of their party," she wrote; but she thought: "Oh, what's it all about? I never saw him before. His voice drew me like a magnet. He came straight to me, too; and I lied like a trooper. How did I know he had no business for the translator? What's the matter with me? I feel so happy!"

II

MARY HAMILTON had come to New York three years before, to study art. She had found that she wasn't nearly as talented as she had supposed. She could draw accurately, and that was all. Head talent alone never makes an artist.

But she didn't want to leave New York. It was a pleasant place for a modern orphan—and Mary was modern, in the essential, not the cheap, sense.

In college she had specialized in languages. She set about getting a position as translator. At the same time she took a night school course in shorthand and typewriting. Hence behold her, now drawing thirty dollars a week with the Inter-Ocean Chemical Company.

She hadn't many friends. The girls at the art school were disgusted with her for leaving their world. Why didn't she open a tea room? With her eyes and her pallor, she would look stunning in a smock of peacock blue.

Mary didn't want to open a tea room. In the first place, she doubted her ability to run one, and in the second place she was tired of tea room talk. It was mainly "dope," in her opinion. In fact, after a year in art fringe circles, she was convinced that there were altogether too many people occupying valuable space in New York who never did anything worth while themselves, and never would do anything worth while themselves—people whose one occupation was pouncing upon and passing along interesting "dope."

Because the Geraldines of the world didn't appeal to her as steady diet, she was known at the office as a bit of a snob. She was sorry about that, but it couldn't be helped.

She had one intimate—Leslie Gaynor, who was pulling herself to a real place in the illustrating world. Leslie understood and approved of Mary's attitude.

There had been a boy, too—a rising youngster in a bank, who had come from her home town. She had enjoyed going out with him. Sometimes she had made sandwiches afterward, and it had been awfully jolly, until—until she had discovered that he was an incurable layer on of hands. Mary wasn't a prude. If she had cared about him, it might have been different; but the idea of seeking thrills just for the fun of it was distasteful to her.

"You may as well know I'm not a—a casual kisser!" she told him, a cold blaze in her eyes.

He hadn't come much after that, and she hadn't missed him much. Evenings not spent with Leslie Gaynor she passed in reading by her own fire. The landlady thought she was insane—"using that old-fashioned fireplace, making yourself all that dirt and litter, what with steam heat—and wasting money on wood!" As a matter of fact, the woodpile in Mary's closet didn't cost half of what many girls in her circumstances spent on cosmetics.

And so, with her work and her friend and her fire at night, she was happy—or she had thought she was. She realized now that she hadn't known much about real happiness.

She took young Mr. King's letters home with her that night—she didn't know why. As she thrust her hand into her deep pocket, the contact of the paper thrilled her.

"Senseless!" she scolded herself. "He's a flirt—a 'swift worker,' Geraldine would say."

But she knew he was not a flirt.

Usually she cooked her own dinner. Tonight she sought distraction in a restaurant; but it didn't distract. She knew a movie wouldn't, either; so she went home.

"Miss Hamilton!"

It was her landlady, in the hall, with a parcel post package.

"Thank you," said Mary, taking over a large, flat box, stoutly wrapped.

The receipt of it awakened no special interest. Her sister-in-law in Ohio had written her that she was sending on some things rescued from the attic. Mary's old home had recently been sold.

"Some keepsakes I know you'll want," the letter had said.

Keepsakes! What did one want of keepsakes in a New York boarding house? It was kind of her sister-in-law, but—

Mary took the box upstairs, rather impatiently, and thrust it on the high shelf of the closet, on top of the extra blanket for her bed. Keepsakes, indeed! She had other things to think about.

She kindled her fire and sat down to her new problem. She thought she might be able to solve it.

"I ought to be more troubled in my mind," she chided herself. "A married man!"

She sat dreaming. She couldn't solve a thing. When she went to bed, she thought she had never felt so happy. There was a persistent vision of deep-set eyes that smiled.

In the morning, however, one thing was clear—she must be on her guard. There must be no repetition of yesterday's idiocy.

Consequently, when she saw Brooks King's gray-suited figure at ten o'clock, she sat perfectly still, though the impulse to rise was there. He was evidently on guard, too. After a time he came to her desk, briskly unobtrusive.

"Here are your letters, Mr. King."

"Thank you." He smiled as he took the large envelope. "I have some more work for you. I really have," he added in a low voice.

Mary felt swift red staining her face. Instantly the man stepped to one side, making a screen of himself. The action was as prompt as her lie had been.

"In regard to this first letter, I'll just jot down what I want you to answer. Some of the South Americans are temperamental fellows, you know—have to be handled with gloves. If you'll let me take that pad—"

She handed it to him, and he wrote:

All bosh. Nothing unusual about the letters. *But what do you make of this other thing?*

Mary's blood raced. She played the game like a veteran.

"I see," she said. "You mean like this—"

She ran a sheet in her machine, and wrote:

I don't know.

She fully intended to stop there, but her fingers went on tapping:

I walk along the Battery Wall at noon.

"Quite right," he answered coolly.

He walked away quickly, leaving two Argentine communications on her desk.

Then shame came. She despised herself. She had recently been a scornful witness to an affair between a married clerk and a girl. Was she, then, no better than that other cheap intriguer?

"I won't go out this noon," she said.

When the sandwich woman came through, at eleven, she bought two sandwiches and a container of milk. She ate them at twelve, sitting at her desk.

At five minutes past twelve she was feverishly adjusting her hat. At ten minutes past the harbor breeze was whipping her slender ankles, and she was drawing in ecstatic lungfuls of oxygen and smiling at the cold, bright water.

III

HE came abreast of her, and they walked on in silence. The little park was almost deserted. It was too cold for bench sitters. No warmth came from the glittering sun. The harbor was a sharp etching.

Suddenly the man pointed.

"See, the fleet is coming in. I wish I could draw!"

"I can," said Mary.

He handed her his notebook and a pencil. She sat down on the edge of a bench and began to sketch. Even through gloves, the strokes came sharply and surely as she pictured the solemn ships parading past Lady Liberty. It was better than anything she had done at the art school.

"I like that," he told her gravely, as she gave it to him. "Thank you!"

A three-quarters chime from somewhere warned her.

"I must go back," she said.

"Yes," he agreed.

She hurried away. As she rounded the corner by the customhouse, she saw that he had sat down again, and was looking at her little sketch. Her sense of happiness deepened.

Yet in that half hour they had not said one word toward solving the mystery. Oh, well, it didn't seem to matter much!

She didn't see Brooks King again that day, nor the next. Geraldine said he had gone to Chicago for the firm.

"And I'll bet he isn't sorry to go, either, if you ask me," remarked the red-headed one. "His wife's entertaining the Eyetalian near-royalty. I saw it in *Gotham Gos-*

sip. Wants to marry off her young sister, you know. It said that the count, or dook, or what's-his-name that's staying there, has his pet monkey with him, and that the beast has to have its own bed, with sheets!"

"You ought not to read that silly stuff, Geraldine."

"Oh, I ain't highbrow like you, Miss Hamilton. A piece of gossip is a piece of beefsteak to me."

"I hope I'm not highbrow!"

"Well, not a real dead highbrow, maybe, but mighty close to it—too booky, and too pale. Why don't you rouge? You've got looks enough. If you was to dress snappier, you'd go big."

"What do you mean by 'go big'?"

"Men—invitations—to eat. With your poise and that das-tan-gay manner, you might even risk stepping out with a married man. You could clamp the lid down when it got necessary, where I couldn't. I'm snappy, and I'm red-headed, but I ain't got the manner. I wish I had! It's the married ones got the money, and, Gawd, I love to eat!"

Mary laughed.

"Gum?"

Geraldine extended a broken package. For the first time, Mary accepted a stick. She wanted to hear more.

"Speaking of the young boss's wife, they say he hates society as much as she's hipped on it. They say his name is all she wants of him—*Gotham Gossip* comes right out with it. The Kings are old, aristocratic stuff, you know; and she sure does play up the name! It's Mrs. Brooks King this, and Mrs. Brooks King that, till you can't rest."

"I must get to work," said Mary uneasily.

"Geraldine likewise," quoth redhead.

"Well, you're exhibiting human symptoms, anyway, Miss Hamilton."

"Human!" Mary exploded silently as she turned away, and deposited her gum in the waste basket. "If she only knew *how* human!"

IV

A WEEK passed. Mary did not come to her senses. She realized that she was living for the time when Brooks King would return. Leslie Gaynor was out of town, too.

Then, one evening, her landlady announced a caller.

"I told him he could go right up, but no, he must send me and my bad heart on ahead with this, as if it was Park Avenue or the Drive!"

Mary took the card.

"Please tell Mr. King to come up. I'm sorry he made you climb the stairs."

She looked about the room quickly. It was orderly. She patted her hair, straightened a brown print on the wall, and poked the fire. She thought she would put on another log, then decided not to. She smoothed her round linen collar.

He came at once to the fire, rubbing his hands.

"This feels good," he said.

"It's a bitter night," said Mary, and drew up the two most comfortable chairs.

He sat down and stared at the logs.

"Mary Hamilton," he pronounced slowly. "Mary Bainbridge Hamilton, it says in the address file. I got in from Chicago late this afternoon, and went right down to look you up."

More earmarks of sordidness! Yet it seemed the most natural thing in the world for him to do.

His glance roved about the shabby room.

"This is your home—one room, but a home. And your fire. I knew it would be something like this; but I don't think you did that thing over there!"

He pointed to a brilliant water color of two Egyptian dancers.

"No, my friend, Leslie Gaynor, did that. You've seen my artistic limit. I'd rather be a good translator than a poor artist."

"That's like you," he approved. His eyes rested on the table. "You have the sort of books I knew you would have, too."

Mary laughed. It was so strange, yet so perfectly natural.

He took out his cigarette case, selected a cigarette, and lighted it.

"I don't believe you care much about smoking yourself," he said.

It was true.

She watched him. He seemed so utterly content—as if for the first time. Her throat suddenly ached with pity.

"I'll make some chocolate," she said, after a time; "and some sandwiches. I didn't have a very large dinner—did you?"

"No, I didn't." The whimsical smile. "I was in too much of a hurry to find out where you lived."

Mary put on a little ruffled apron, and lighted the gas plate. She brought sliced

ham and salad dressing from a tin box on the outside of the window sill, and spread a clean newspaper over one end of her table for a working place. It never occurred to her that a King wasn't used to having his meals prepared so. He watched her, smiling lazily.

They ate gravely, with keen enjoyment. The tray was perched on a wabby stand between them.

"You ought to have one of those leaved tea carts," he told her.

At half past ten he rose.

"Good night, Mary Hamilton," he said. "I've waited all my life for this evening; but it was worth it!"

V

AFTER that he came often. Sometimes they dined at a quiet restaurant, or went to a play, or took long walks. They never met at the lunch hour again, or communicated during the working day.

What the man seemed to enjoy most of all was just to sit with Mary beside the fire. He never tired of it. They didn't talk much. Sometimes Mary took her work basket down from the mantel, and darned stockings while he smoked.

Mary wondered if she were really herself! Informal friendship with a married man!

"But I don't feel wicked," she told herself. "It's as if I, too, had waited all my life for this. It's a fine thing—and it doesn't matter what the world would say!"

Then something happened to trouble her. He sent her a beautiful walnut tea wagon, with drop leaves. He had often brought flowers, candy, prints for the wall, books; but furniture! It savored of—no, no, no—she wouldn't say it!

She unpacked the tea cart and set her modest tea things on it. It fitted into the homely scheme like a friend, yet stood out with distinction. She loved its satiny surface, and laid her cheek against the wood.

Furniture! Her heart beat fast.

Well, what of it? Why not? Was she not essentially modern? Books and theater tickets cost money, too, for that matter; yes, and even subway riding, which you had to do before you could get to a good place to tramp. What was the difference? None. Besides, he knew she needed a tea table.

Ah, that was it—needed it. That made the difference.

Nonsense, she argued; he had sent it out of his big kindness, to give her pleasure. That was all.

And yet it marked a step. She knew that. She had been drifting ever since she had known him. Drifting craft must pull up—somewhere.

"But why?" she fought back. "Why can't we just go on being friends? Why must there be steps—progression? I don't want it so."

She sat down rigidly. The door of the closet stood open. On the high shelf was the box of keepsakes that had come the day when she first saw Brooks King. It was still wrapped in the paper in which it had been shipped, months before. She had never opened it, had scarcely given it a thought.

Now, suddenly, the significance of it smote her consciousness. It seemed as if that box of girlhood mementos exemplified the thing in her that argued against drifting—as if she herself, as she used to be, were inside that dusty wrapping paper.

She closed the closet door firmly. Ridiculous! A lot of childish trash!

But the box continued to loom importantly. The closed door did not shut it away from her.

"I'm going to Leslie's. I can't stay here," she decided sharply, and dragged on her things.

The illustrator was delighted to see her.

"Had your dinner? No? Then we'll have a party—steak and mushrooms, and Italian ice cream. Where have you been, child? I've been sick for a sight of you since I got back."

Leslie never waited for questions to be answered. She was a large, brown-colored girl, older than Mary.

Under her friend's petting, Mary relaxed a little. Leslie went out, whistling, after supplies. Mary slumped down on the end of the big divan in the rather crowded, untidy studio. She was acutely glad she had a friend.

Later, lingering over their coffee—the rest of the dishes had been bundled into the kitchenette—Leslie repeated:

"But really, Mary, where have you been? You look different, you know."

"How different?"

"Oh, sort of shining. I'd like to paint you this way, in blue draperies, for a Madonna. What's the matter?"

"Don't!"

Mary had grown white. Leslie narrowed her kind eyes, saw the small clenched hands—and waited.

"I'll say it the rawest way possible," Mary gulped. "I'm in love with a married man!"

"Good Lord!" said Leslie softly. "Not you!"

"Yes, I—and it's quite all right, too!" Mary blazed. "He's—he's wonderful, Leslie, and—and he's never so much as kissed me. Believe it or not, it's true! We've been waiting all our lives for each other, and there's not a sordid thing about it all!"

"Child, a little coherence! Of course, nothing you would do could be sordid, Mary."

Mary gulped, and laughed a little.

"I—I sounded as if I was trying to convince myself pretty hard, didn't I? Well, I was—I was! Oh, Leslie, Leslie, what shall I do?"

"Tell me about it."

So Mary did. Leslie's eyes widened as the story unrolled.

"But such things don't happen," she murmured. "It's too ideal."

"But it has happened—and to me! It was ideal until now; but now—it's narrowing down," Mary whispered.

They sat silent. Then Leslie said slowly:

"Well, you're not a coward!"

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, I'm not advising you, understand; but I know what I should do. I'd let the world—go—hang!"

"You'd—"

"Mind, that's not advice, though. Listen, child—you stay here with me to-night. You need me to make a fuss over you. Tomorrow I'll meet you after work, and we'll go up to your room and burn up that fool box of kid stuff. Then you can go at the thing with an open mind."

Mary began to cry. She was very tired.

"Now you sit there and weep, while I wash the dishes. Have a good cry—best thing you can do. Then I'm going to chuck you into a nice hot bath, to get all the stiff kinks out of your mind. Then you'll put on my new eleven-dollar *crêpe de Chine* nighty—and by to-morrow morning you'll be competent to help the Almighty run His universe!"

Mary laughed hysterically.

"I only want to—find out how to run—my own little universe!"

The evening's program was put through, and Mary went to sleep in Leslie's arms.

VI

THE last part of the schedule was not carried out, however. Next day Leslie received an order for a magazine cover, which prevented her from meeting Mary.

Mary went home alone.

The first thing she saw in the room was not the inviting tea table, but the box on the closet shelf. The door had sprung open in her absence. She shivered. Leslie had commanded her to burn the box at once, alone; but—she couldn't.

She prepared an inadequate dinner and ate part of it. She did not use the new gift. At eight o'clock Brooks King came.

"Want to go somewhere?" he asked; but she saw his glance rest longingly on the chairs by the fire.

"No," said Mary.

She smiled. She was no actress. She was aware that the face she turned toward him bore traces of struggle.

He came close to her and took her face between his hands.

"You've been worrying, I know. It's that damned tea cart! I shouldn't have sent it."

He took her in his arms.

Later, sitting by the fire, she saw that there were grim lines in his face, too. The old peace was gone, she thought—gone.

They had never spoken of his wife. Now he began to talk about her quietly.

"There's no harm in Florie. It wouldn't be fair to force divorce upon her. It would hurt her in her most vulnerable spot."

Mary knew that he meant his wife's social ambitions, and the prestige of his name.

"So I can't do that. I've thrashed it all out. I can't. After all, she's done nothing blameworthy. It's a matter of viewpoint. I'm her particular hell, as much as she's mine. It wouldn't be fair."

"No," said Mary.

"And—the other thing, here in New York, wouldn't be fair to you, leaving orthodoxy out of the question. Your friends wouldn't understand. There'd be complications. There always are. You'd be classed with—with kept women, and—well, I couldn't stand it, even if you could!"

She couldn't answer. Were all men so considerate?

"But there's another way, Mary."

She looked up.

"I've been casting about quietly, and I've landed a job—an agency for the Southern Chemical Corporation. My headquarters would be Sao Paulo, in southern Brazil. We'd never have to come back, if we didn't want to."

Mary's pulses pounded.

"We'd have a home," he went on.

"Would you be happy?"

"Would—I—be—happy?"

He smiled. They sat in silence.

"Then you'll go with me?" he demanded suddenly.

She got up and rearranged the tea things.

"You'd be—running away, wouldn't you, from—everything?"

"You mean Florie?" He laughed.

"Half a continent between us is her idea of married life, so long as she has my name fast." Then his face sobered. "There's dad, of course. He'd be hit hard, with my leaving the firm; but it's my own life I've got to live, Mary!"

"Yes, it's your own life, Brooks," she repeated.

"Dad's partly responsible for my marrying Florie." His voice took on a hard edge. "Inter-Ocean was hard up—we were forced to reorganize. That brought Florie's father into the firm, with his capital—which we needed. Later we found that—well, we were expected to repay by doing something for him socially. Dad urged the marriage. We had accepted too much financially from them, and she was damnably pretty, and—we were married. It's one of those hellish mix-ups, that's all."

"Still, you were a free agent, even if your father did urge you."

"I was young. I hadn't much judgment. He was mature—that's why I blame him. Besides, this can't hurt him financially now. Inter-Ocean's sound—thanks to my wife's family; and I've got to live my own life!"

Mary didn't reply. Abruptly, without debating the impulse, she opened the closet door and took down the box. She dusted it over the hearth.

"What's that?" he asked.

"Just some little-girl stuff. I thought I'd show it to you."

They undid it. At the top lay a yellowed linen photograph frame, embroidered with red roses.

"I made it for my brother Alec. He died four years ago. Isn't it ugly?"

"It is," he agreed; "but I'll bet Alec liked it."

Next came a worn manuscript tied with a blue ribbon. Mary opened it shakily. The rotted ribbon parted at a touch. Together they read:

AN ESTIMATE OF BECKY SHARP

BY M. B. H.

It is impossible to read about Thackeray's sprightly character, *Becky Sharp*, without enjoying her. But no right-minded person could really respect and admire such unscrupulousness.

They chuckled.

"Still, I rather like it," mused the man. "You were a serious youngster!"

The box next yielded up a Latin grammar and some neat notebooks. Then came another literary production, tied with red and black, Mary's high school colors.

THE POWER OF THE WILL

BY MARY BAINBRIDGE HAMILTON

It was groggy with platitudes, and oh, so sincere! They chuckled again.

More textbooks, and some dance programs. Then, in the bottom, a calendar made of mat board, decorated with Prussian blue forget-me-nots. An inscription of fancy letters, once gold, now black, said:

Dear Mother
Forget Me Not
From your daughter Mary
Aged 8.

"Oh!" said Mary, and caught the calendar to her breast.

Silently they packed everything back again.

"Poke up the fire now, Brooks," said Mary, in a queer, bright voice. "We're going to burn the whole boxful!"

He looked startled.

"Are you sure you want to do that? They don't take up a great deal of space, you know."

"I'm sure!"

It took quite a time for the close-lying papers and book covers to be consumed. They had to prod the fire at intervals; but at last there was nothing but ashes.

"That's that," breathed Mary.

"Yes, that's—that. Now, will you go?"

"Yes!"

VII

At the office, next day, Geraldine remarked Mary's appearance.

"Why, Miss Hamilton, somehow you

10

look like a funeral and a wedding all jammed together!"

"How do you get such notions?" Mary laughed.

Geraldine continued to stare.

"Honest to Gawd, you do look funny. Had any bad news—or good news? Darned if I can tell which."

"No," said Mary, thus answering neither question.

The sight of a gray-suited figure impelled her to rise—as it always did; but, as always now, she did not rise. She wondered what kind of houses people lived in at Sao Paulo.

She hurried home after work. Brooks was coming early, to make plans. They were to sail in two weeks.

As she unlocked the door, she paused. The room gave out a sense of occupancy. Her heart constricted. It was some moments before she forced herself to go in.

She looked about the familiar, dusky interior. She could hardly breathe. Was that some one sitting there at her table—a child with smooth braids and red hair ribbons, bent over a tablet? She could almost hear the soft scrape of a Spencerian pen; or was the child painting, with a stubby little brush, stiff Prussian blue forget-me-nots?

Mary's fingers rattled like bones against the light switch. She turned it. There was nobody there, of course. The walnut tea cart looked very hospitable, with its spread leaves.

She sank down, shivering, by the dead hearth. She forgot about getting dinner.

Brooks King's knock sent the blood charging through stiffened limbs. She rose to let him in.

"I can't go," she said dully.

As his arms came around her, she braced herself for a torrent of pleading. None came. He was silent with the silence of hopelessness.

"I know," he said at last. "That kid stuff—you can't burn it up. The little girl that wrote about *Becky Sharp* and will power, and painted the forget-me-nots for her mother—I knew you couldn't go! In a way, I can even feel glad," he went on; "because the Mary that can't go—is the one I love best!"

Gently he put her in the largest chair by the hearth. He brought kindling, and built up the fire.

"What's Miss Gaynor's number? I'm

going to call her up on my way out, and ask her to come over here."

She told him Leslie's telephone number.

He was standing at the door now. His eyes said "Good-by, Mary"—and a thousand things. His lips didn't say anything.

"If I just lift my arms, he'll come back," Mary told herself.

But she sat still.

The fire leaped up gayly. Brooks King went out of the room, and closed the door behind him.

Kid Neptune

HOW IRVING BLOOM, THE WORLD'S CHAMPION LIGHTWEIGHT,
GOT HIS NAUTICAL NICKNAME

By Myron Brinig

EVERY now and again the boys who wait in line for five or six hours at a stretch in front of Madison Square Garden—the "never weary" boys—will ask me:

"How did Kid Neptune get his name?"

In answer, I proceed to tell them in my own modest way. You know Kid Neptune, who wears the light-weight crown tipped at an angle of forty-five degrees on his well-shaped head—a head whose hair is always precisely parted very close to the left ear. Only once did his hair become ruffled. That was an interesting evening, of which there is more to be told presently.

To be exact, his names are three. He was born into the world Irving Bloomkin. After he knocked out Tim Brodget, the Sinn Fein Frog, in three rounds, he changed it to Irving Bloom. "Irving Bloom" sounds and looks much better in the sporting columns; and the fighting boys sure do love to see their names in print.

A slick one, Irving—slicker and faster than radio. Have you watched him? It isn't that he punches so hard. His right doesn't compare with Battling Nelson's, for instance. It isn't so much his left. Compare it with the left Ad Wolgast carried around with him—no comparison.

No, it isn't his right, nor his left. It's his grace. The Isadora Duncan boy, the high-brows call him—the guys with the stiff shirt fronts and the Prince of Wales vocabularies. Grace, boys—grace, and brains. He thinks as far ahead of his challenger as

Hal Chase used to think ahead of his teammates out on the Highlands.

Oh, but he's a pretty one to watch, is Kid Neptune! He growls at 'em, and they swing; but he isn't there. They begin looking around for him, and they keep looking until they see—stars. A graceful one, a sweet and pretty one, is Kid Neptune; but when he lands, the taste is bitter—very bitter.

Where did he get that science, that grace floating from his every movement, as tangible and magnetic as Pavlova's? Where did he get those studious eyes, that neat and precise head so well stuffed with gray matter that it sticks out a little above the eyes? Where, where did he get the smile that sends many a blasé society queen from the Garden to Fifth Avenue with her heart fluttering and her eyes shining? I'll tell you where. Listen!

From his papa, that's where—Papa Bloomkin.

Old-timers, step forth! Graybeards, students of the ring, shake the dust out of your eyes for half a second. Surely you remember Papa Bloomkin? Wasn't he the boy who almost won the championship back in 1894, you ask? Wasn't he the guy who once knocked Young Corbett down three times in one round? That is he—Papa Bloomkin.

He was a spry one in his day, but he dislocated a shoulder. Ah, now you remember for certain! A fast one, a dazzler, was Papa Bloomkin. Too bad he dislocated a

shoulder! Too bad! He might have been champion.

"Irving's a smart fighter. Why should I deny it? But fighters like I was ain't born every minute," papa will tell you.

A trifle jealous of his boy, you say? Perhaps; but please remember that Papa Bloomkin had mixed it with the toughest ones, and daily relived his most glorious battles.

It's in the blood, boys. Blood is thicker than half-of-one-per-cent beer. You might almost say that papa took the kid when the kid was in his swaddling clothes, and began teaching him the cute tricks, the nifty tricks, the hit-'em-and-duck tricks. Papa had them all down to his finger tips, and he passed them on to his son, a price-less inheritance.

II

Boys, have you ever lived in a Bronx apartment—not a flat, but a brass-buttoned, elevator-service apartment in the Bronx? Oh, yes, my laddies, they have 'em in the Bronx, same as they have 'em on Riverside Drive; only in the Bronx there is more—well, atmosphere; more dyed in the wool, fresh fish, kosher atmosphere.

Nothing is too good for Irving Bloom. He's grateful for all that his papa taught him, I tell you. Poor papa! He lost mamma the year before the war. May she lie easy in her grave!

"Here, papa—here!" Irving said. "It's long enough we've lived in Delancey Street. We're going to move to a swell apartment in the Bronx!"

"Swell apartments he wants!" scoffed papa. "Swell apartments! Delancey Street ain't good enough for you! Ain't you born on Delancey Street? Ain't it on Delancey Street I learned you to get in some swell punches in a clinch? The Bronx he wants!"

"But, papa, listen to reasoning! I got plenty dough. Didn't I haul down eight thousand iron men from my fight with Lefty Glynn? We ought to be ashamed, living in Delancey Street. The time that millionaire lady came down here—Fanny Lorgan, what is so charitable—that time she came down here to see me, why, I was ashamed. You picking the feathers off a kosher chicken in the bathtub! A fine how-do-ya-do for Fanny Lorgan! And her the daughter of a Wall Street millionaire!"

Papa put up a fight; but he is not as

young as in the days when he knocked Young Corbett down three times in one round. Every argument papa put up for a continued residence in Delancey Street the kid dodged and side-stepped, and then unexpectedly landed an argument of his own—Fanny Lorgan, brass buttons, free janitor service. He won.

Behold papa installed in the Bronx, his feet propped up on the window sill overlooking the air shaft, deep in *Vorwärts*. Behold papa arguing with the brass-buttoned gentleman of color who rules the elevator:

"I'm telling you, you big stiff, my boy could lick Joe Gans!"

"An' Ah tells yuh you're wrong, man! Dar ain't no man alive could whip Joe Gans!"

"Go 'way, you big loafer, you elevator conductor what you are! My Irving, he could stop Joe Gans in three rounds. Three rounds I give Gans—not more."

"Why, man, sakes alive, whar you got dat line of talkin'? Ain't you ever done see Joe Gans in action?"

"What is this inaction? What you speaking from, inaction? I give Joe Gans three rounds—not more."

Bells ringing on the first floor; bells on the second floor; bells on the eighth floor.

"Elevator, please! Will you hurry that elevator, please? My Gawd, the service around here is terr-r-rible! At my sister Sadie's house—elevator, please!"

"Ah sho' do know what Ah'm talkin' about. Ah says Joe Gans—"

"Get away, you big Pullman massager, you! There ain't no fighter what can lick mine Irving, dead or alive. You talk? Do you know from what you talk? Can you explanation by me a good argument?"

Papa Bloomkin was beginning to enjoy life in a swell Bronx apartment very much.

III

THEN began a very mysterious time—a time of doubts and fears for his boy's welfare on papa's part; a time of strange absences, sudden departures, and unexpected returns on Irving's part.

On the Fourth of July—a well known holiday, even in the Bronx—Irving Bloom disappeared. The last skyrocket had expired languorously in the midnight air, the last firecracker had set off its miniature bombardment, and Irving had not returned to the swell apartment.

Always, hitherto, he would turn in not later than eleven. Papa would visit the fighter's bedroom and extinguish the lights.

"You sleepin', Irving? Why you burn electric lights till eleven o'clock? You think maybe we ain't got enough bills?"

"You douse the glim, papa," Irving would reply. "Good night. Remember to put the milk bottle out. Last night you forgot."

The Fourth of July exploded darkly into the 5th, but Irving's bed was empty. There was no doubt about it—his bed was coldly, devastatingly empty.

Papa immediately roused the elevator man from a deep trance, and communicated his fears.

"*Oi, finster is mir*—darkness is upon me! Irving ain't home yet! Call the police! Run by the drug store! Maybe he is inside taking a ice cream and shooting craps. Quick! Ain't you never was in a hurry?"

The elevator man, anxious as papa himself, departed on his quest with a swift shuffling almost uncanny in a man of his leisurely habits.

Papa called the police department, but received no satisfaction. He walked the length and breadth of the swell apartment, from kitchen to front parlor, from midnight to dawn, relieving his anxiety by muttering short prayers in Hebrew. Then he commenced again, front to back, southern exposure to dumb waiter.

At last the telephone. Papa stuffed his mouth into the transmitter.

"Who is it? Yes, this is papa. Is this you, Irving? Where you are? Surprise? Don't talk from surprises! You in a hospital? No? You're all right? Feeling in the pink? What is this in the pink? Is this a game you play mit me? Sure, I called up the police station. Ain't you think I got enough worries? Come home right away quick! Surprises he wants to give me! Ain't it enough I burn electric lights till four o'clock in the morning? You make it all right by me to-morrow? You better make it all right by me to-night! What you say, to-night is already to-morrow? What kind of talking is this? To-night is to-night, and to-morrow the rent is due. Irving—Irring!"

There was a great thundering at the door. Before papa could extricate his mouth from the transmitter, the elevator man had deftly entered.

"He ain't at the cohnor drug stoh. Drug stoh's closed up an' dahk. He ain't there nohow!"

"The world's coming to an end!" exclaimed papa, raising both his hands above his head. "He calls me up by the telephone and tells me he's got a surprise! Four o'clock in the morning he calls up! Ain't it the world coming to an end?"

But the world did not come to an end—not this giddy world. Next morning, perky as you please, Irving came back. Radiant he stood in the doorway confronting papa; radiant his face, shining his eyes. On his head perched a nifty cap with a glimmering peak. His coat was navy blue, his trousers flannel and crisp white.

Papa threw his arms about his boy, and kissed him. Then he drew back and roared:

"Loafer! Is this a time to be getting home? Eight o'clock in the morning! Loafer what you are!"

"Papa, don't get excited. You'd think I wasn't old enough to take care of myself, the way you talk."

"Loafer! Where you was last night?"

"Oh, a secret."

"What is it, secrets? You got secrets from me, your papa? Am I a stranger that you got secrets from me? Loafer! Where you was last night?"

Irving dodged.

"Maybe you was out with some from these wild womans, these *shiksas*. Is that a pastime for a prize fighter, a champeen?"

"Papa, you know that wild women don't mean anything in my young life."

"Maybe you been drinking viskies or wood turpentine. Ain't I told you what drinking makes out of a man? An old wet rag, that's what it makes out of him. You think you stay champeen and be also a old soaker?"

"Pa-pa! You know I never touch the stuff. I tell you I ain't been on any spree, and I ain't got any *shiksas*. If you'll let off steam, I'll let you know in a little while. The thing's hanging fire."

"Fire? You been in a fire? Is that a way to keep in conditions? Ain't Mayor Hyland got plenty firemen without you?"

"Aw, papa, lay off the razz, will you?"

But papa could not lay off the razz. This was a serious business—a tremendously serious business. Papa had hideous visions. First vision, Irving hitting it full speed with a group of wild women. Second

vision, Irving imbibing that which is prohibited under the laws and the Constitution. Third vision, Irving playing the roulette wheel. Any one of these things Papa Bloomkin knew spelled destruction for a prize fighter. Any one of them was bad enough; but all of them? Then how lay off the razz?

This mysterious business continued for more than a month—a month of strange absences, early morning telephone calls, prayers, arguments, and evasions. Hanging fire—that was Irving's terse comment on the mysterious doings. Hanging fire! Papa's remaining black hairs succumbed to the inevitable gray.

One Sunday morning Irving ordered his father to come with him.

"I got a surprise for you," he said.

"If it's a wife, I don't want to see her!"

They started. The route lay through many strange streets—streets of old weather-beaten houses and sinking cobblestones, streets that wound and climbed and dropped unexpectedly. The sky was dark with clouds. Thunder bellowed. Lightning ripped the heavens.

"Maybe you joined a new lodge, Irving, and you're making me a new member. Ain't it enough I belong to the B'nai Brith and the Moose?"

Irving dodged cleverly. He was a slick one!

"Lay off, papa!"

"Maybe you're a member from one of those Gas House gangs, Irving. That I should live to see you mixed up with gas houses! *Oi, geveh, Amarica!*"

Irving did a sailor's hornpipe on the decayed pavement of the mysterious neighborhood. The peak of his cap glistened. His white flannels looked very crisp and neat.

The pilgrimage abruptly ended.

"What is this? *Oi, geveh*, it's the *yavum*—the ocean! What you want to do, Irving—drown ourselves? Why should it a young, healthy boy like you want to submit suicide?"

"This," patiently explained the lightweight champion, "is the Harlem River. Now, papa, look where I point. See over there, next that motor boat? Where you looking, papa? I said that motor boat painted 'Nokomis.' Don't look up in the sky. Look where I point—see?"

"What is this, Irving—a game? Or maybe you bought out a junk dealer?"

"See? Next to that motor boat, papa. There she is. Ain't she nifty?"

"What she?"

Papa strained his eyes, but saw no she. He saw boats—big boats, little boats, sailboats, catboats, motor boats, yachts, canoes, tugs, trailers; but he saw no she.

Irving continued to point.

"Now do you see her? Ain't she tidy, papa? Ain't she swift and sweet and nifty-looking?"

Papa achieved exasperation.

"Is it a lady you're talking from, Irving, or a boat?"

"A boat, papa—my boat—my yacht. I bought it yesterday. That's where I been sleeping nights. See the name in gold letters—'Daughter of Rebecca'?"

"Irving, you bought a ship? Are you crazy?"

"The Daughter of Rebecca, papa—she's mine! I'm going to live on her. We're going on a cruise. Come on—I'll row you over to her, pops!"

"Not one foot will I take off the sidewalk, Irving. Is this a fun for a prize fighter—a seasickness life like this? Is this a exercise for a champeen? Where is the thief what sold you this piece of junk? A pain in the head is worse enough, let alone a pain in the stomach. How much you pay for that piece of junk, Irving?"

"Papa, do you call Rebecca junk? Look at her lines once—just look at her lines. Look at that brass. Pipe the plush. And you call that junk? Ten thousand dollars she stood me, and you call her junk!"

"Ten thousand dollars for a piece of junk like that? *Oi, veh is mir!* And you call it a pleasure yet! Brass and ploosh! Five cents I give you for her—not more."

Reluctantly Papa Bloomkin allowed himself to be shoved into a rowboat. Stiffly he sat on the hard seat while Irving rowed. Grimly he received his deep-sea baptism—grimly and reluctantly.

Expertly Irving rowed. Expertness was essential, for this part of the river was as thickly cluttered with craft, large and small, as a fly paper is stuck with flies. It was a strange, new world to Papa Bloomkin, a world as remote from the warmth and vigor of the prize ring as the Harlem River is removed from the Danube.

From all sides arose a pounding, a grinding of engines, a hullabaloo of sirens and shrieks. On all sides was a crowd of weekend yachtsmen intent upon their beloved

if blundering toil. All this effort, this maritime enthusiasm, was lost on Papa Bloomkin. To think that his son, the lightweight champion, had succumbed to this!

Wild women papa had been prepared for; liquor he would have battled in the open; but this crazy business! It was too much for him. He sat a bowed and broken figure in the stern of the rowboat. *Ach, geveh, Amarica!*

"Here we are, papa. Grab hold of the ladder while I tie her fast. Heave ho, my laddies! Sixteen men on a dead man's chest! Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of ginger ale!"

Weakly papa reached for the ladder. Exhausted, he clambered aboard. His nostrils were attacked by a sharp, pricking smell of tar and rope. He stood on the deck, not daring to make a move. He was aware of a devastating glare in his eyes—the glare of sun-dazzling brass. Where was the Bronx? Would he ever see again his beloved Delancey Street? Ah, for the smell of the kosher meat markets! Ah, for the sight of a rabbi murmuring a prayer over a freshly killed chicken!

"Well, papa, what do you think of her, hey? Ain't she nifty? Papa, meet Rebecca—Rebecca, meet papa. This is the wheel. This is the compass. We call this the boom."

"Boom? You mean bum, Irving, no? Bum!"

"Boom, papa; and this is the flying jib."

"A dirty sheet he calls a flying jib! *Nu*, we live and learn!"

"See that riggin', papa? That 'll keep me in trim. Watch me!"

While papa looked on dolorously, Irving skimmed up and down the rigging as fast as chain lightning. Proud the peak of his cap! Dancing his legs!

"And you call that exercise for a prize fighter, Irving—jumping up and down like a monkey? You call that training? You just see if next month Lew Feldman don't knock you out! Then maybe you'll be sorry you went in the flying bum business!"

Suddenly, from somewhere within the depths of the nifty little boat, there sounded a gong. Sweet it sounded in Irving's ears—sour in papa's.

"Yo-ho!" cried Irving. "Grub, mate! Grub!"

Papa looked bewildered.

"You ain't telling me, Irving, that you eat on this ship? You don't eat here?"

"Herring and crackers, mate—and a bottle of rum!"

"Herring and crackers on a ship? Irving, you want to die maybe?"

"Pa-pa! Lay off the razz!"

"Well, all I can say is that it's a good thing it comes up after you eat it," papa observed.

Papa stumbled into the interior with a load on his shoulders, and emerged with a load in his stomach that threatened his equilibrium. Not even Irving's choice cigars could calm him. He leaned weakly over the rail and prayed for relief—relief that was not long in coming.

IV

EVENING bathed them in a shower of cool, green stars. The Daughter of Rebecca lay anchored in a lulled, lispering slumber. On deck Irving Bloom, champion lightweight of the world, lay back in his chair, communing with the heavens. In the chair beside him sat Papa Bloomkin, fuming and fretting, curiously out of tune with the romance that infested the Harlem River.

Quietly Irving arose, stretched himself, and started searching for something. Presently he returned with that something, and resumed his chair. Then he started strumming idly.

Startled, papa clutched at his chair.

"What you got, Irving?"

"A uke, papa."

"A *vas*?"

"A uke. 'Ah, the moon is shining softly on the Waw-bash,'" gurgled Irving, strumming gently.

"A juke?"

"Not a juke, papa—a uke."

"What is this juke?"

"It's a Hawaiian fiddle. They play 'em in Honolulu. 'Sweet Rosie O'Gra-ady,'" caroled Irving, strumming softly. "What a night! What a night! This is what I call life!"

Papa stirred uneasily in his chair.

"Life!" he grunted. "It's a life maybe for a millionaire—a Perrypont Astor or a Vincent Rothschild—soft, easy, and *zofitic*; but is it a life for a prize fighter, Irving? Is it a life to keep your muscles like oiled machinery and your heart strong?"

"'When it's moo-oonlight in Ka-lu-a, then nights like this is dee-vine,'" warbled Irving. "'When it's moo-oonlight in Ka-lu-a—'"

"When I was young, them was the days," said papa. "You think it prize fighters lazed around in yachts? You think it they played jukes? Jukes and yachts is for girls, not prize fighters!"

"Ukes, papa—not jukes," said Irving gently. "'Sweet Ad-uh-lee-eeen! Mi-uh Ad-uh-lee-eeen! At night, dear heart, for you I pi-un—'"

"Maybe, Irving, you will open it a flower store next, yes? Maybe you got by you a powder puff?" taunted papa. "Is this a business for a prize fighter? Maybe John L. Soollivan wouldn't turn over in his grave if he knowed!"

"Lay off the razz, papa. The world ain't what it was. Nowadays prize fighters is educated. Nowadays they got brains and book learning. Times ain't what they was. 'Though Ape-ril show-ers may come your wa-hay, they bring the flow-ers that bloom in Ma-hay,'" crooned Irving over his uke.

"Flowers!" scoffed papa. "Didn't I told you that you was going in the flower business?"

"Go ahead, papa—go ahead! You think I'm listenin'? Huh! Instead of talking so much, why don't you look at the view? Look at that steamer coming into the harbor. You came over like that once, hey, pops? When you was a immigrant, hey?"

"You bet you my sweet lives I come by one of them boats!" answered papa hotly. "Maybe you think I came over swell—first class! You don't know I come steerage, and eat lemons all the way to keep what I got inside me? I said to mamma, when the boat got here, 'Never no more sea trips for me,' I said to mamma. 'The place to die is in a nice, respectable house, and not on the yawm—the ocean.' And now you go and buy a yacht! Yachts we got to have. There ain't enough worries in the world!"

"Hush, papa—keep quiet! I thought I heard some noise."

"Maybe it's robbers," said papa, suddenly interested. "If they want the yacht, it wouldn't be no great loss, neither."

"Hush, papa—somebody's coming on board. Say, look—four men! What do they want, anyhow? Hey, you guys! What you want here? Don't you know this is a private yacht?"

The four guys thus addressed didn't seem to know. One of them whipped a

pistol from his pocket and held it in the direction of Irving and papa.

"Hands up!" yelled the four intruders in unison. "Hands up, or we'll shoot your damned heads off!"

"Crooks! Jessie Jimmies!" murmured papa to himself. A thrill of rare delight ran through his veins. "Crooks, *ganoov-em!*" he whispered to himself, and the words tasted lusciously in his mouth. Action, at last—a little action!

"Gunmen!" whispered the lightweight champion, jerking papa's sleeve.

"Gas Housers!" whispered papa, electrified into a sudden happiness.

"Hold up your hands, you kikes! Be quick about it, too!" came the repeated command.

"Only a referee could hold up my hands!" cried papa, and was instantly at them.

"That goes for me, too!" challenged Irving, and he sprang to the fray.

V

THEN began a very fast and furious business.

Light-Fingered Chris had not expected such a bold defiance on the part of our two yachtsmen. His fingers, usually so deft, so quick, experienced all the symptoms of acute paralysis. His mind ordered, "Pull!" but his muscles were insubordinate. For a moment he stood still, a statue labeled, "Crime." Then he felt his jaw thunder and crash in agony, as if dynamited—but it was only Papa Bloomkin's fist.

"Crack!" spoke the pistol, and "Crack!" echoed the Harlem River. The bullet sped upward and lost itself somewhere in the stars. In the stars we shall leave it. Better there than lodged in the anatomies of our two yachtsmen.

The light-fingered one showed a tendency to fight back. He shot a left jab at papa's solar plexus. Papa had once knocked Young Corbett down three times in one round; and what is a left jab more or less to a fighting terror, even though the terror be on the shaky side of forty?

Papa was not daunted. His fist, grown a bit woolly from disuse, still caged a wicked punch. Now it dwelt sharply, curtly, on the point of the light-fingered one's jaw.

"So! How you like that, you Cossack *gonif*, you? And how you like this, you Jessie Jimmy, ho?"

Thrills laid away in mothballs for twenty years flashed and sparkled anew in papa's veins. Vividly he remembered a thousand other sweet blows of his young prime. In less than three minutes Chris of the light fingers lay sprawled on the deck of the Rebecca. The pistol, flashing murder in the moonlight, had fallen beside him.

The eyes of the light-fingered one were closed; but other eyes were glued to the revolver, and other hands reached for it. Nick the Pick reached for it, but, in the words of the poet, his reach exceeded his grasp. It happened that Nick fell on the gun, Irving on Nick, Larry the Rat on Irving, Papa Bloomkin on Larry the Rat, Archie the Dude on Papa Bloomkin. They struggled, a five-layered fury.

How melancholy is the sight of rotten apples falling in the autumn! I am not about to embark on a little essay, however. I am simply comparing the four gangsters to rotten apples, one having already fallen, and the other three being just about due for a fall.

The five-layered fury rolled up and down the deck. Arms and legs became bewilderingly entangled. Entangled also were the grunts and curses of the combatants; but above this profane fabric of sound there rang clear the war cry of Papa Bloomkin:

"How you like this vun, you loafer, ho? And how you like this vun, ho? Cossacks, sewer rats what you are!"

Back and forth, from port to starboard, from bow to stern, rolled the five-layered fury. Papa was enjoying himself very much.

The pistol slipped from the deck into the river, and with it dived Nick the Pick, sobbing a prayer of thankfulness. Another rotten apple fallen from the poisoned tree! Now they were two to two—Archie the Dude and Larry the Rat on one side, our two yachtsmen on the other.

Hear Irving crying:

"Leave 'em to me, papa! I can handle 'em! Lay off!"

Hear papa answering:

"Lay off, he tells me! Ain't it me what seen them first? Maybe I got to take lessons from you, yes?"

Hear Archie the Dude suddenly whining in a tone of terror:

"Gee, if it ain't Irving Bloom hisself!"

These were the last words Archie the Dude spoke that evening. His senses achingly folded their tents and stole away.

On precisely the same point of the jaw he received two calamitous hate taps—one tap from papa, a tap full of poison inclosed in steel; the other tap from Irving Bloom himself, full of T. N. T. wrapped in barbed wire. Two swift, successive hate taps finished him. It was an unusual experience for Archie the Dude, late king of the Gas House gang.

Another rotten apple to the dust! There was only Larry the Rat now—Larry the Rat hanging precariously, doomed to inevitable fall. Well did Larry note the cry of his late confederate:

"Gee, if it ain't Irving Bloom hisself!"

The sweet, docile Rebecca had suddenly become a place of terror to Larry. With an amazing burst of speed he made for the ladder, our fighting yachtsmen at his heels. He searched frantically for the rungs, and missed them.

"Don't touch me!" he screamed.

Papa and Irving touched him simultaneously. He speculated wildly on a choice spot in which to be buried—a spot safely distant from lightweight champions and the fathers of lightweight champions. His speculations were rudely cut in two, however, by the piercing, knife-like warning of a police whistle.

The police! Larry the Rat lifted himself desperately over the rail and fell down, down into the Harlem.

Again the police whistle sounded. It penetrated to the somnolent consciousness of Archie the Dude and Light-Fingered Chris. They lifted their heads, shook their senses desperately into life, and followed Larry the Rat over the rail.

Before they could quite free themselves from the torture ship, they received two calamitous kosher kicks from behind—two kicks straight from the hip. Then they dived into the safe, releasing depths of Mother Harlem. What matter that the water was icy cold and the waves high? They had escaped a worse fate from the deadly hands and feet of our two fighting yachtsmen.

VI

"WELL, papa, a yacht ain't exciting, huh?"

"Nu, maybe it happens once a year. Only you call this excitement? It ain't nothing to what I could do when I was twenty years younger!"

"Papa, quit your kidding!"

"It was nothing for your papa to fight six loafers all by one time in his young years."

"Almost broke my uke," said Irving, rescuing the precious instrument from the deck. "'An' when you see-hee clouds upawn the hills, you soon will see the yellow daffydills,'" warbled Irving, recommending where he left off.

"Four crooks ain't nothing for me to lick!" papa said, preening himself.

"You?" Irving put aside his uke indignantly. "You to lick? Maybe now you'll say that I wasn't there at all! I licked three of those four crooks, papa, don't forget!"

"Three you licked? Irving, don't talk by me such foolishness! The three big ones I licked. The little one, what didn't amount to so much, you hit maybe one or two times. And now he tells me he licked the three big ones! Irving, how you get it that way?"

"Papa, don't tell me! Didn't I finish the one with the gun? Why, you weren't even around. Oh, you're some fighter—I mean you was, twenty years ago!"

"Irving, do you sit there and tell me that you licked the one with the gun? Maybe I'm a baby. Maybe it wasn't me that licked all four!"

"Papa, you better go to bed."

"Loafer! Do you call yourself a son? I tell you I chased those four gas-housers from the boat by myself! Is that the way to speak to a father—telling me that I didn't lick those four crooks?"

"All right, papa—have it your own way. You licked them without any assistance. All right! But I didn't know you had four hands."

"My two hands is better than four by you," replied papa hotly. "Much assistings I get from you! I tell you I licked the whole four with one hand!"

"All right, papa, all right—let's change the subject. Ain't you feeling tired after licking the whole gas house district?"

"I guess I sleep on the yacht to-night, Irving—yes?"

"You surprise me, papa. I thought you didn't like Rebecca."

"She ain't such a bad one," papa admitted. "I think I have a piece of herring and some crackers before I go to bed."

"Sure, papa—go ahead! You must feel hungry after knocking out the whole East Side!"

The moon shone. Papa Bloomkin lay snoring in his bunk. The stars twinkled and skipped across the vast stage of the heavens; and papa snored an accompaniment to their dance. The water lay calm as glass; and still papa snored. The river whistles cried out over the water; but papa's snores outdid them.

Irving, on deck, serenaded the stars.

"So kee-heep on looking for a bluebird and listening for his sawng, whenever April show-ers come alaw-awng!"

VII

'Tis the night of the big fight. "Irving Bloom, World's Champion Lightweight, *versus* Lew Feldman of Toronto," read the posters outside the Garden. Long strings of fight fans wait patiently for the opening of the doors. There is a certain electricity in the air—a certain suspense and pulsing excitement. 'Tis the night of the big fight.

Inside, tier upon tier of seats fill up with a thickening profanity. Smoke rises and curls; sparks of match flame fly hither and yon; voices of the mass growl and cheer with an eager volubility.

The place is packed now—packed as full as a rush-hour Subway train; thick and solid with humanity; blue and gray with smoke; whirring with a constant buzz of talk. The referee comes forward, smug as an age-old Buddha. Smugly he raises his flat hands, as if they were the tablets handed down to Moses for all to read. The buzz of talk thins down to a pin point of silence.

He introduces the fighters—first, Feldman of Toronto.

"Wow! You got a nerve! Don't let him crowd you, Lew! Back to the border for yours! Got anything on your hip, Lew? Wow!"

Then Irving Bloom is brought forth, proudly, dramatically. He is the *pièce de résistance* of the evening, the best kept for the last, the sweets, the richness of the banquet. The human sardines rise from their cramped places and stretch themselves in a riotous ovation. They rise and then subside as harbor lights flare and darken. The cheers split the rafters.

Come to the ring side. Here is Papa Bloomkin at his favorite place. Suddenly he approaches his son and speaks to him through the ropes. Irving listens, then looks up keenly at one of the boxes. He grins and waves his hand to the occupants.

They wave back hilariously, do Archie the Dude, Nick the Pick, Larry the Rat, and Light-Fingered Chris.

Witness now a curious spectacle. See Archie the Dude rise from his place, lean far over the box, and address Lew Feldman of Toronto in this wise:

"You poor boob, wait till he hits ya! You'll get a nice sleep—take it from me!"

Great laughter, as if the god of war himself were stirred to his risibilities.

Behold now Larry the Rat rising from his place and shouting:

"Five hundred to one hundred on Kid Neptune! Five hundred to one hundred on the deep sea champ, Kid Neptune! Ask me—I know!"

Soon the name is taken up by hundreds of throats:

"Kid Neptune! Kid Neptune! That's your name!"

Observe Nick the Pick thrusting himself into the spotlight, saluting the mob impatiently and yelling:

"Kid Neptune is some fighter, but did you ever see his pop? My Gawd!"

Business of Papa Bloomkin rising from his place, looking shrewdly up at the box, and answering:

"Them is the boys what ought to know, I tell you!"

A steam roller of mirthful gossip flattens the Garden. Then the fighters shake and scramble it up. Soon Lew Feldman is wishing he were back in Toronto; and it isn't very long before he goes down like a rotten apple and takes the count.

Four men in a box know exactly how Lew Feldman feels.

"It might 'a' been worse," says Larry the Rat to Nick the Pick. "Supposin' Kid Neptune's father had been in the ring!"

A BALLADE OF LOST LOVES

HAD I the gold that some so vainly spend,
For my lost loves a temple would I raise—
A shrine for each dear name. There should ascend
Incense forever, and hymns of golden praise;
And I would live the remnant of my days
Where hallowed windows cast their painted gleams,
At prayer before each consecrated face,
Kneeling within that cloister of old dreams.

And each fair altar like a priest I'd tend,
Trimming the tapers to a constant blaze;
And to each lovely and beloved friend
Garlands I'd bring, and virginal soft sprays
From April's bodice or moon-breasted May's;
And there should be a sound of running streams
And birds 'mid happy leaves in that still place—
Kneeling within that cloister of old dreams.

O'er missals of hushed memories would I bend,
And thrilling scripts of bosom-scented phrase,
Telling of love that never hath an end;
And sacred relics of wonder-working grace,
Strands of bright hair, and tender webs of lace,
Press to my lips, until the present seems
The past again to my ensorcelled gaze—
Kneeling within that cloister of old dreams.

ENVOY

Princesses unforgot, your lover lays
His heart upon your altars, and he deems
He treads again the fair, love-haunted ways,
Kneeling within that cloister of old dreams!

Oliver C. Moore

The Man Hunt

A ROMANCE OF NEW YORK AND THE CHESAPEAKE

By Hulbert Footner

Author of "Thieves' Wit," "Country Love," etc.

XXII

DOORS opened and slammed throughout the yacht. Feet came running. Among the first to arrive was the skipper from his quarters up forward, struggling into his coat as he ran. Pen looked on at it all, strangely detached. She felt as if she were watching the actors in the scene, including herself, from some point outside her body.

"We've got Counsell!" Riever cried to each new arrival. It was almost a scream. "There he is! Secure him! Put him in the strong room forward of the staterooms. Have an armed guard at the door day and night. If he resists, put him in irons!"

The skipper and another clapped hands on Don's shoulders.

"Take your hands off me, and I'll go with you quietly," Don said.

Surrounded by his creatures, Riever, his face swollen and flaming, walked up close to Don and all but spat on him. He had lost all control of himself. He had forgotten Pen's presence.

"You grinning blackguard!" he cried. "Grin while you can! You won't be grinning when they lead you out to the chair. I'll be there to see it!"

Pen turned away her face. She could not be angry at the little man; he was beneath it. She was sickened with disgust. As for Don, he merely drew down the corners of his lips aggravatingly, and drawled:

"Be yourself! Be yourself, Ernest! You're all wet!"

A titter was heard on the outside of the circle.

"Take that fellow away!" Riever cried furiously.

Most of the men accompanied the skip-

per and his prisoner along the deck to the forward companionway. A steward or two were left hanging about the after deck, and a pretty, frightened stewardess, clutching a pink kimono about her.

"Get away! Get away, all of you!" yelled Riever, waving his arms.

When they were left alone on deck, Riever went to Pen. She stood on the same spot in the same position, the pistol hanging limply down.

"My darling!" he said thickly. "Now I know you're mine!"

A sharp little cry escaped Pen. She had overlooked this possibility. Instinctively her hands went up between them. She did not point the gun at him, but its mere presence in her hand was sufficient to bring him to a stand.

She backed slowly to the rail. When she reached it, she glanced down over her shoulder at the dark water with a curious lightening of the horror in her face.

That glance overboard was not lost on Riever. He looked at her, scowling and pulling at his lip. Lest he should hear what would be intolerable to his self-love, he made haste to furnish reasons for her conduct.

"Of course you're all upset," he muttered. "It's natural, after such a strain. I understand—"

Pen was suddenly overcome by weakness. The gun clattered to the deck. She staggered to the nearest chair and sank into it.

"Carter!" Riever called sharply.

The pink-clad stewardess appeared miraculously in the cabin doorway.

"Miss Broome is faint," said Riever. "Get some smelling salts."

Pen wanted to keep the girl out on deck.

"Wait!" she said weakly. "I'm not going to faint. I want nothing. I only want to go home."

Riever bent over her. She closed her eyes to avoid seeing him.

"Of course that's what you want," he murmured. "I'll take you just as soon as I can dress."

Pen did not protest, because by this time she had regained sufficient self-possession to realize that until this man had fulfilled his promise to her, she must not rebuff him too much, although she almost fainted with horror at his nearness.

As he left the deck, he ordered Carter to stay with Pen. The stewardess came sidling forward with an emotion in her face that she could not control. Her eyes were both hard and soft as she stared at Pen. In that look Pen saw as clearly as if it had been written on the girl that she was Riever's mistress; but at that moment the discovery caused her no feeling.

"Can I get you anything, miss?" the girl asked in a purring tone.

"No, thank you," said Pen. "You needn't wait."

The stewardess retreated to the deck saloon, where she stood hovering in the doorway, stealing glances at Pen that were diffident, wistful, and sneering.

Riever came back fully dressed, and attended by various servitors. The speed boat was brought around to the gangway ladder, and Pen was handed in. She had picked up the gun and concealed it within her dress.

"That skiff belongs to one of the men in the tents," she said, pointing.

A sailor was told off to row it ashore.

They landed on the old wharf, and Riever led her up the hill. To Pen's relief, they were followed, a hundred feet or so behind, by a bodyguard. Riever had his hand under her elbow. She would not allow herself to object to that, though her flesh crawled at his touch.

"You feel better now?" he asked.

She nodded.

"Tell me how it came about."

She had her story ready for him. She cut it as cunningly to the pattern of truth as she could.

"I searched to-day in all the places I knew of, but I found no trace of him. On my way home along the road this evening I saw him returning among the other searchers. It seems that he joined the

searchers some days ago. That's why you couldn't find him."

"What devilish cunning!" cried Riever.

"It was growing dark," Pen went on. "He dropped behind the men he was with, and we had some talk. We couldn't say much there among all those people. I wasn't going to let them know; so I made an appointment with him to meet me on the beach at eleven, when I supposed everything would have quieted down. He suspected nothing."

"Oh, he thinks he's irresistible!" sneered Riever. "It was dangerous. You should have arranged to have men concealed there."

"I wanted to deliver him up to you myself, as I had said I would."

"You are a wonderful girl!" murmured Riever.

"I went armed," said Pen, "and I forced him to come with me. That's all."

Riever carried her hand to his lips.

"You are a woman in a thousand!" he cried. "I never heard of such pluck!"

Pen pulled her hand away.

"Please! Please!" she murmured. "I can't stand it—not to-night!"

He eagerly snatched at the little promise she held out.

"Ah, I won't press you," he said amorously. "I know how you must be feeling—tender-hearted woman, and all that. Cuts you all up to have to give up a man to justice; but, believe me, he's a bad one through and through. You've done a service to all decent people. You'll soon see that yourself."

"There's something else I must tell you," Pen went on. "As I was bringing Counsell along the beach, a man interfered between us. I think it was one of the detectives. I suppose he wanted to share in the reward. Anyhow, the two men fought on the beach. I let them fight it out. Counsell got the best of the other man, and tied him up. I suppose he's lying there yet, halfway between the wharf and the light-house. As soon as it was over, I forced Counsell to come along with me just the same as before."

Riever laughed loudly.

"What a woman you are!" he cried. "You've earned that reward ten times over. Don't you worry—nobody else shall touch a cent of it!"

The clear-eyed little familiar inside Pen whispered to her:

"This is all very well, but as soon as he has time to think it over he'll begin to see the holes in your story. You must get the money out of him to-night if you can!"

But how could she bring herself to speak of it?

They lingered at the door of the big house. The bodyguard was waiting off in the drive, with his back discreetly turned. Riever took enormous encouragement from the fact that Pen did not try to hurry away from him.

"What are your plans?" she murmured.

"We'll weigh anchor early to-morrow," Riever said, "and steam to Annapolis, where I will obtain the necessary extradition papers. Then I'll have Counsell sent North by train. Before nightfall to-morrow he'll be lodged safe in the Tombs!"

"The Tombs?"

"The New York city prison."

Pen blushed crimson in the dark, but doggedly forced herself to bring out the words:

"But how about—what you promised me?"

Riever laughed. It had an unpleasant ring, though he probably meant it good-naturedly enough.

"What a funny girl you are! Anxious about your thirty pieces of silver, eh? Don't worry—I'll see you in the morning before I go."

Pen was obliged to let it go at that, though it was with a sickening anxiety.

Riever's voice thickened again.

"You've quieted down now," he murmured. "You're not going to let me go like this!"

Pen's hands went up again, but he caught her roughly to him. He could not reach her face, but he pressed a burning kiss on her neck. Pen tore herself away and ran shudderingly to her room.

XXIII

NEXT morning Pen was late, for her, in getting downstairs, and her father was before her. He had already been out of doors, and had heard the startling news. He was pale with excitement, and his expression presented a comical mixture of elation and outraged parental authority.

"What is this?" he cried. "Counsell is caught? And caught by you?"

"That pleases you, doesn't it?" said Pen, in a quiet way very aggravating to an excited man.

"Pleases me!" he cried. "My daughter starting out at night on such an errand! Wandering around the woods with a gun! Pleases me!" He ended on a more human note. "You might have told me when you came in, instead of letting me learn it from strangers."

"I was all in," said Pen simply. "I couldn't face the added excitement even of telling you."

"Um! Humph! Ha!" he snorted. "What will become of your reputation?"

"Mr. Riever didn't seem to think it had suffered," Pen replied slyly.

"Ha! Well, of course he wouldn't say so; but I shan't be able to sleep quietly for thinking what *might* have happened!"

Pen saw that the indignant parent only wanted to put himself on record, and that underneath the man was delighted. She went ahead and gave him his breakfast. He ate it in a charming humor.

Afterward she went about her household chores, waiting for Riever, sick with anxiety. Suppose he didn't come? Suppose the yacht was getting ready to sail? She couldn't go out to see. She could not humiliate her pride to the extent of going down to the wharf to look for her money.

After all Riever did come, and early, too. It still lacked a few minutes of nine o'clock. Outside he met Pendleton, who brought him in, and the two men were closeted in the front drawing-room for a while. Pen felt by instinct that this interview boded her no good.

Presently her father came to her in the kitchen.

"Mr. Riever wants to say good-by to you," he told her.

He avoided Pen's eye as he said it, and there were complacent little lines about the corners of his mouth.

"Riever has given him more money!" Pen thought with sinking heart.

Pendleton did not accompany her back to the drawing-room. Riever was waiting for her, carefully dressed in his stylish, square-cut yachting suit. He was brisk, and inclined to be effusive—signs, in Pen's eyes, that he was secretly uneasy; but perhaps that was natural.

His eyes were as devoid of expression as an animal's. She could not guess of what he was thinking; his words came merely from his lips.

"How are you?" he asked solicitously. "Ah, pale, I see! Not much sleep, per-

haps? Well, thank God, this nasty business is about over!"

Pen did not feel that this required any answer. She waited.

"I said I'd come to see you before I set sail this morning," Riever went on briskly, and then came to a somewhat lame pause.

Pen waited in an anxiety that was like physical pain for him to produce a check book or a bundle of notes; but he made no such move. There was an awkward silence. Finally he said, as if at random:

"By the way, do you know what became of Keesing's revolver? He's making a fuss about it."

"I haven't it," replied Pen coolly.

"He said you took it from him," Riever went on, with a light laugh; but his eyes were tormented.

"He's mistaken," persisted Pen. "When he fell, it flew out of his hands. I don't know what became of it."

"He said you carried it away in your hand."

"That was the pistol you gave me in the morning. You saw it," she added, feeling pretty sure that Riever had been in no condition to distinguish one pistol from another.

"Why, of course!" he said. "It's absurd!" But there was no real conviction in his tones.

"If you'll wait a moment, I'll get it for you," said Pen.

"Please don't bother. Keep it as a souvenir."

There was another silence. Pen saw that he dared not accuse her openly. The matter had to be thrashed out to a conclusion, so she grasped her nettle firmly.

"What else did Mr. Keesing tell you?" she asked scornfully.

Riever's attempt to carry it off lightly was painful to see.

"Oh, I don't take any stock in it," he replied, with his forced laugh.

"But I ought to know, shouldn't I?"

Riever laughed excessively.

"Said you had no intention of giving that fellow up until he surprised you together. Said you were just walking up and down the beach, talking."

His eyes were darting ugly, pained glances at her. Pen laughed, too.

"In the full moonlight!" she exclaimed.

She was secretly relieved. If Keesing had overheard their talk, he would of course have repeated it.

"I told you there was nothing in it," said Riever.

"If I was friendly with him, do you think I'm the sort of person to give him up?" demanded Pen.

"Certainly not; but Keesing argues that after he had recognized Counsell, there was nothing else for you to do."

"If I'd wanted to save the other man, I could easily have shot Keesing," Pen boldly declared.

Riever stared.

"Well, I believe you are capable of it," he muttered.

Pen followed up her advantage quickly.

"Obviously a crude attempt to get the reward for himself," she said.

"That's what I thought; but Keesing clearly understood that there was nothing in it for him, anyway. He didn't bring the man in."

"Then it was just spite," said Pen.

"No doubt," Riever agreed.

Pen's heart sank. She was making no progress whatever. He would agree with everything she said, and act according to his own secret motives. She was determined to drag these out into the light.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" she asked bluntly.

"Why, nothing," he said, with an air of surprise.

"I mean about the money," insisted Pen firmly.

He averted his head.

"What do you want so much money for?" he muttered.

"What does anybody want money for?" said Pen. "Thousands of things!"

He came toward her eagerly.

"Tell me what they are," he stuttered. "Anything—anything that money will buy! You have only to name it!"

"I can't take gifts from you," said Pen coldly. "I've earned this money, haven't I? You promised it."

"I don't go back on my promises."

"Well, then?"

"But just at the moment I haven't it by me."

"It's all over!" Pen thought, and tasted despair.

"One's money gets all tied up, you know," he went on, more glibly. "I've been under heavy expenses. Of course, I can arrange it when I get back to town. I'll bring it to you myself, just as soon as I can get this ugly business off my hands."

It won't take long. Public opinion demands that the man be tried speedily, and I can set certain influences at work. I fancy the trial will be brief. In six weeks you can expect to see me back again—and under much happier circumstances, I trust. I'm afraid at present you have certain doubts of me—almost a dislike. This has been such a beastly business! When I come back, my whole aim will be to remove your doubts, to show you what I really am, and what you mean to me. Thank God, time is on my side!"

Pen kept her eyes down to hide the thought she was sure must be speaking through them:

"If you came back here under such circumstances, I should kill you!"

Her stillness frightened him. He began to hedge.

"But what am I saying? You don't have to wait for your money till I come back. It is a matter I can arrange with my bankers. You may expect a check within a week."

Pen was not deceived. She foresaw the silky, apologetic letter she would receive at the end of a week—without any check. She was silent.

Riever's instinct warned him against making any lovely demonstration at such a moment.

"Good-by," he said.

Pen's generous, open nature imperiously demanded that she should avow her true feeling and crush him like the noxious worm he was. It cost her a frightful, silent struggle to keep it in. She kept saying to herself mechanically:

"We haven't beaten him yet. I must go on deceiving him!"

Without raising her eyes, she offered him her hand. He carried it lightly to his lips, and quickly left the room.

How he got out, or what she herself did during the next half hour, Pen could never have told clearly. When she came back to the realization of things, it was to find herself kneeling at one of the windows in her room, listening to the clank of the yacht's anchor chain. The sound seemed to be striking on her bare heart.

She saw the mud hook slowly rise out of the water and the yacht's screws set up a churning astern. The graceful vessel began to move. She came about in a wide circle and swept out of Pen's range of vision behind the trees. As she passed the

lighthouse, she saluted with three blasts of her melodious whistle, and the lighthouse bell tolled in answer.

Somewhere in the bowels of that vessel—in darkness, perhaps, and manacled—sat the bright-haired Don, grinning derisively at misfortune. He was depending on her—keeping himself up, no doubt, with the assurance that she had secured the money to save him.

Pen's head dropped on her arms.

XXIV

AFTER the departure of the yacht the crowd at Broome's Point quickly broke up. Slow-moving ox carts started up the Neck road, and noisy motor boats put off up the river and across the bay.

Before it was midday the old unbroken peace had descended on the remote place, and all that had happened in between seemed like a dream. As of old, the fish hawks plunged for their wriggling prey, buzzards circled high in the blue, hens clucked contentedly at the kitchen door, and turkeys set up a sudden gobbling in the fields.

Pen could not long give herself up to despair. She must act, if she wished to save her sanity. With a tormented face she went about the house in a whirl of activity.

Black Aunt Maria's eyes rolled askance at her mistress. Pendleton remained down on the beach, seeing the boats off. Pen suspected that he was purposely keeping out of her way.

When he came in to dinner, he was affecting an air of busy abstraction. When his daughter addressed him, he would reply gently:

"Don't interrupt me, my dear. I have an idea just taking shape in my mind."

This was an old dodge of his, when he wished to escape something unpleasant. Pen smiled to herself without mirth, and quietly bided her time.

When he had finished eating, he attempted to slip out of the room, but Pen was on the watch for that.

"One moment, father!"

"Another time, my dear. I must get this down on paper before it escapes me."

Pen put herself determinedly between him and the door.

"Sorry," she persisted, "but I have some rights, as well as your ideas."

"Only an ignorant person sneers at ideas," he said loftily.

Pen refused to be drawn aside.

"Now that this business is over," she began mildly, "I hope there's no objection to my going away for a little while."

His eyes narrowed and hardened, as a weak and stubborn man's must.

"Why should you go away now?" he demanded. "The trouble is over. This is the best place to rest."

"Just the same, I must go," said Pen. "Will you give me the money?"

"I'll take you for a visit to Cousin Laura Lee, at Frederick," he suggested. "The trip will do us both good."

"I must have more of a change than that," insisted Pen. "I need six hundred dollars."

"Preposterous!" he cried. "You know I have no such sum to fritter away!"

"I have worked for you six years," said Pen wistfully. "A hundred dollars a year doesn't seem much."

"Oh, if you're going to measure your duty toward me in dollars and cents!"

"But I'm not! I—"

"That's enough. I am your father. I am the best judge of what is right for you."

Pen was too sore at heart to be very patient.

"You got more money from Mr. Riever this morning," she said at a venture.

There was a significant exchange of glances—startled on his part, quietly assured on hers. He saw that it was useless to deny it.

"Well, if I did," he said with dignity, "you may be sure it wasn't a gift. I gave a fair return for it. Anyway, that's my capital. I can't spend it."

"Did you undertake to keep me here for him?" Pen asked quietly.

By the way he puffed out his cheeks and wagged his head, she saw that she had guessed somewhere near the truth. She was unspeakably saddened. Her father! What was the use?

Meanwhile he was noisy in his aggrieved protestations.

"How can you say such a thing? Am I not your father? You know that my every act is directed by concern for your good. My life is devoted to that end."

Pen struggled on, though she was convinced of the hopelessness of it.

"I grant that willingly," she said; "but you might be mistaken—"

"Never!" he cried, without any notion of his absurdity.

"Well, father, we mustn't quarrel," said Pen. "I appeal to your affection for me. I seldom ask you for anything. I am not one of the flighty kind. You must see that I am in deadly earnest. I *must* go away. If I'm kept here, I shall go out of my mind!"

But cupidity had for the moment overcome his natural affections—as it has a way of doing.

"Pooh! You're talking like a flighty girl now," he said loftily. "Permit me to be the judge of what is best for you."

"Oh, all right!" agreed Pen, with a sudden change of tone. "Let's say no more about it."

Pendleton was a little astonished by his victory, for his case was bad.

"Well, that's my own dear girl!" he said, approaching her, full of fine, fatherly approval.

Pen cast an odd, cold glance at him and passed out into the pantry. Pendleton went upstairs, feeling acutely uncomfortable.

During the afternoon they pursued the usual routine. Pen's first act was to let Doug out of the barn. The good dog was wild with delight. Pendleton went for the mail.

When he came into the house for supper, his eyes sought Pen's face with a furtive anxiety. All was serene there, and his spirits rose mightily.

In all these years Pendleton had learned little about his daughter's nature. He persisted in believing what he wished to believe. During the meal he was affable and discursive. Pen listened with a sufficient smile, and was as attentive as ever to his wants.

They spent their usual quiet evening under the dining room lamp, Pen with her mending, Pendleton with his newspaper. An instinct of caution warned him not to read aloud any of the comment on the Counsell case. The news of the grand dénouement had not reached Baltimore in time for that morning's paper. They retired early, Pen offering her cheek for the usual good night kiss.

As soon as the sounds of Pendleton's snores began to issue through the transom over his door, Pen came out of her room again. She was dressed in hat and suit, and carried a small valise. She also had a note addressed to Aunt Maria, giving certain directions for breakfast. As Aunt Maria could not read, Pen knew that the mes-

sage would be brought to Pendleton's attention early.

She slipped out of the house by the back door. Doug, in his kennel, whined with pleasure. She unfastened him with an admonition to silence. Doug was too experienced a dog to waste much energy in unnecessary noise.

Pen walked swiftly back through the paddock, and through the stable yard gate to the road. Doug ran ahead, with his tail high. It was a fair night, with a pale sky and dim stars.

She was too early. She loafed along the road. At the gate of the distant field where the sheep were pastured, she leaned her elbows on the bars, waiting for the moon, while Doug pursued his canine investigations far and near. He had all the lost time of his imprisonment to make up. Finally, when the silver rim appeared, Pen let down the bars and whistled for him.

"Fetch them out, sir!" she said.

Doug knew his business. Half an hour later the huddled little flock was striking into the woods, with Pen at its heels, and Doug all intent upon his charges.

Pen paused to let them drink their fill in the little stream that flowed across the road. They plodded on through clogging sand and around mudholes that never dried up from one year's end to another. There was no regular beat to the thudding little hoofs, for those in the van were always hanging back, and those in the rear running to catch up. They passed along in little gusts of sound, like nervous fingers drumming on a window pane. Pen was choked with dust.

"What shall I look like in the morning?" she thought.

Little owls mourned far off, and occasionally the bark of a fox brought Doug to a stand with raised ruff and murmured growl. Through openings in the branches, stray shafts of moonlight fell on the backs of the sheep, making them look like little gray ghosts creeping along with bowed shoulders.

There was a place, miles deep in the woods, where they passed a squatter's shack close beside the road. The nervous patter of hoofs brought a figure to the open door. In a curiously tense pose he watched them pass.

It was ten miles through the woods to the fork in the road where you take the right hand down to the wharf at Hunger-

ford's Run, three miles farther. It seemed to Pen that there would never be an end to the aimless twists of the road first off in one direction, then back in the other. It was level for the most part, except once or twice when it precipitated them into a gully, with a branch, over which Pen had to jump.

In spite of scurrying hoofs, their net progress was slow, and dawn had broken before they came out on the open road. Pen, dreading curious eyes, urged them on as fast as she could.

She had one encounter. A farmer, early at the plow, turned his team at the end of his furrow, just as Pen with her convoy passed in the road below. His jaw dropped. He rubbed his eyes at the strange spectacle of a young lady, modishly dressed—as she was, to him—covered with dust, driving a flock of sheep miles from anywhere. Pen did not know him, but by a process of elimination he guessed who she must be. His face expressed a sort of agony of curiosity until the obvious explanation occurred to him, when it cleared.

"Driving your sheep to the steamboat?" he said.

"Yes," said Pen, blushing, and looking straight ahead.

He clambered over the fence, and jumped down the bank to her side.

"I just put up my clover last week," he said in friendly fashion. "Next field on the left. Drive 'em in and let 'em crop awhile. You got plenty time."

Pen thanked him. He walked beside her, glancing at her from the corners of his eyes. He opened a gate for her, and the grateful sheep scattered inside to their breakfast.

"You come far?" he ventured.

Pen nodded.

"Come through the woods at night alone?"

"I had my dog."

"Well, it's more than I would have done. Why didn't you ride a hoss?"

"I'm going up on the boat," said Pen. "I had no way of getting the horse back. The dog can find his own way, of course."

"Well, you're a good-plucked young lady, I'll say! You'll find a good spring down at the foot of the slope, yonder. How about some breakfast? I'll be going home to mine directly."

"I brought it with me, thank you," said Pen, indicating the valise.

With many a backward look he returned

to his horses. Pen was free to wash at the spring, and to brush her clothes.

Arriving at the dilapidated wharf, a mile or so farther, she had to run a gantlet of curious stares. Everybody wished to help her, and the sheep were quickly penned and tagged. Pen could see in the men's eyes what a storm of gossip would break loose once her back was turned, but she cared little about that.

The steamboat, on her up trip, was due at eight o'clock. Pen's chief anxiety was lest it should be late enough to allow her father to reach Hungerford's Run on horseback. Pendleton had no right to stop her, of course, and nothing that he could say would shake her determination; but she shuddered at the idea of washing the family linen there on the beach before strangers.

However, the Princess Anne arrived before her father, and the sheep were driven aboard. Pen put her arms around the good dog's neck, not caring who might witness her emotion.

"I can't take you! I can't take you!" she murmured. "Don't blame me for it!"

They had to lock Doug in the little warehouse before she could go aboard. Pen heard him flinging himself against the door, and listened to his sharp, anguished barks, feeling like a traitress.

The steamboat proceeded on her leisurely course from wharf to wharf up the bay.

XXV

THE Criminal Court building in New York is a huge square block of yellow brick, with an incongruous cornice and grandiose trimmings. It is of the Tammany period, and experts give it a leading place among architectural aberrations. It was run up on the site of an old pond, and was no sooner up than it threatened to fall down again. There was a great scare at the time, but that has apparently been forgotten. The monument still stands, secure in its ugliness.

It is one of the busiest places in the city. It knows no long vacations during the heated term. Day in and day out, the mills of justice grind feverishly, without ever quite catching up with the grist that is offered. Frequently judges from quieter jurisdictions have to be imported to relieve the overworked metropolitan incumbents.

Within the building there is a spacious inclosed court surrounded by wide, cement-paved galleries, tier above tier. Every day,

during court hours, these galleries are thronged with what is surely the most diverse collection of humanity ever brought together under a roof—witnesses, principally, or friends of the accused. Every walk of life is represented, every stratum of society.

Among the countless types four are repeated over and over—wary-eyed initiates of the underworld, weeping women, shabby and insinuating lawyers looking for business, and detectives with eyes as wary as the gunmen, but better-fed men, and full of a conscious rectitude. Dozens of little dramas are going on simultaneously.

On a certain stifling morning in midsummer, the interest of the huge building, with its dozens of court rooms, was focused in General Sessions, Part One, where the case of "the people *versus* Counsell" was being tried under Stockman, J.

Common as murder trials are in that building, they never quite lose their zest, and this, owing to the prominence of the persons concerned, was a celebrated case. Every morning a great crowd struggled to get into the court room, though the evidence was not of a sensational nature.

There was no woman in the case. It was a foregone conclusion, too—one of those cases that have been tried out in the newspapers before they are brought into court, with a verdict of guilty rendered against the prisoner. Nobody had a good word for the accused man except the morbid women who stormed the court room doors, and who secured a majority of the seats inside, simply because they were more persistent than the men. These women always sympathize with the prisoner, particularly if, as in this case, he happens to be young and comely.

As a result of the furore in the newspapers, many days had been taken up in the effort to secure an impartial jury; but once the taking of evidence began, the proceedings moved swiftly enough.

Only two days had been required by the prosecutor to present his case. It was handled by Hackett, the particular star of the district attorney's office. He had scarcely been obliged to exert himself, for everything was going his way.

In three days more the defendant's direct testimony was all in. Counsell was his own principal witness. He had told a straightforward story on the stand, and a ruthless cross-examination had failed to

shake it. Unfortunately for him, he had no witnesses to support his story. Proof of it rested with the dead man. There had been no witnesses to the final scene between them.

The trial now seemed to be nearing an end, having reached the stage of rebuttal testimony offered by the prosecution.

When court adjourned for the noon recess, Corveth, of defendant's counsel, made his way out of the building with a heavy air of dejection. He was a young man, of the same age as the prisoner—an old friend, it was said—and he had full charge of Counsell's case. He had put up a strenuous fight for his friend, but perhaps not a brilliant one. He was a first-rate lawyer, but he lacked the art of certain famous pleaders who, when they have a bad case, set out to charm and dazzle judge and jury with moving, if irrelevant, eloquence.

Corveth was in deadly earnest. He passionately believed in his client's innocence, but he had scarcely succeeded in proving it. He had often irritated the bench by his dogged fight on points of law, which took up time without apparently getting anywhere. Even now it was a mistake of tactics for Corveth to betray his discouragement so clearly to the inquisitive observers in the galleries.

Two hours later, when he returned, the man's whole bearing had changed. Dejection had given place to an air of excitement so great that it was impossible to tell whether it was a pleasurable excitement, or the reverse. His pale skin seemed to glow with inner fire. His clothing was a little disarranged. The man looked slightly stunned.

He was escorting a heavily veiled woman—a young woman, judging from her figure and carriage—and they were followed by such an oddly assorted group as you could find walking together only in that building. Obviously these people were witnesses. Among them were two other women—one a flashy, pretty little thing with hard, assured eyes, the other apparently a domestic servant. The men ranged all the way from a highly prosperous gentleman—a banker, possibly—down to a couple of taxi-drivers and a farm laborer.

Word went around the galleries like wildfire that there was something up in the Counsell case, and a new crowd pressed to the doors of the court room. It was too late to get in. Corveth left his witnesses

outside, where they remained, guarded against the questions of the curious by a couple of young men from his office.

Within the court room Corveth was seen to enter into an excited, whispered discussion with the defendant. Corveth was the excited one. Counsell appeared to be trying to soothe him. Their talk was interrupted by the entrance of the judge.

When the proceedings were opened, Corveth rose and said, in a voice that trembled oddly:

"If it please your honor, since we adjourned, important new evidence has been offered to me."

The judge stared and bit his lip in irritation. There were so many cases on his calendar! Were they all to be dragged out past all reason by the lawyers? This, no doubt, was merely the grand stand play of a lawyer with a bad case. To do him justice, his honor controlled his irritation before he spoke.

"Mr. Corveth, I trust you have taken thought of what you are saying. You have had every opportunity to present your case."

"Twelve new witnesses have just been brought to me, sir, whose existence I never suspected."

"Twelve! How could that be? You have been studying this case for weeks. In what manner were new witnesses brought to you at this late date?"

"They were brought to me by a person interested in this case, who has been conducting an investigation unknown to me."

"And you think that their evidence is important?"

"Of the utmost importance, your honor. It throws an entirely new light on the case."

In his irritation the overworked judge was understood to mutter:

"I doubt it!"

Corveth flushed crimson, but held his tongue. Observing the flush, his honor went on more mildly, but still with some bitterness:

"Understand, Mr. Corveth, it is not your word that I doubt, but only your estimate of the importance of this evidence. A long experience on the bench has taught me that matters which appear of overwhelming importance to opposing counsel have a way of shrinking sadly when they are brought out on the stand."

A titter went around the court room. The gavel rapped viciously.

"Should this evidence not be admitted now, sir, it may put the State to the expense of a new trial."

The assistant district attorney was on his feet.

"I object! Surely it is grossly improper for counsel to make such statements in the hearing of the jury!"

"It is only his opinion," said the judge wearily. "It will not appear in the record. Well, what do you want me to do?" he asked Corveth.

"To give me time to hear these persons' stories, sir. I ask an adjournment until to-morrow morning."

The judge said nothing, but his face was set hard against it.

"Or, if Mr. Hackett is willing to go on with his evidence in rebuttal, I only ask for leave to reopen my case to-morrow. I can sit up all night."

Mr. Hackett smiled rather pityingly.

"With all respect to counsel," he said, "I don't see that anything is to be gained by going on, if Mr. Corveth is going to introduce an entirely new element."

"I agree with you," said the judge. He appeared to have made up his mind. "Mr. Corveth," he went on, "you realize, of course, that if I allow you this time the district attorney is entitled to a similar indulgence. Where would we end? These gentlemen on the jury have already been detained from their homes and businesses for many days. I owe them the greatest consideration. I must have some further assurance of the importance of your evidence before I can consent to any delay. You say this story has just been told you by somebody. Is he present?"

"It is a woman, your honor. She is present."

The court room pricked up its ears.

"Then why not put her on the stand?"

"It would be useless, your honor. She could give little or no direct testimony as to what occurred. She has collected the testimony and brought me the witnesses."

"They are here, too? Then put your principal witness on the stand. I will give you as much latitude as I can in questioning him. If anything important comes to light, I will grant the adjournment you ask for."

"I thank your honor. Unfortunately, as I understand it, none of these witnesses can tell a complete story of what happened. Each one can only add a link or two to the chain. You could scarcely judge from the

testimony of any one of them how important their evidence would be when taken collectively."

The judge sighed for patience, and bit his lip.

"If I might offer a suggestion, your honor?"

"Well?"

"Could you not request the jury to retire, and hear this lady's story in your chambers? You could then decide in a few minutes whether it warrants an adjournment."

His honor tapped his desk reflectively with a pencil. The assistant district attorney was protesting.

"Your honor, whatever may come of this matter, an impression is being created here prejudicial to the case of the people. I—"

Corveth interrupted him.

"I should be quite willing to have Mr. Hackett present while this lady is telling her story, so that he may have the fullest opportunity to meet the evidence she has to offer."

This, more than anything that Corveth had said, inclined the judge to believe that the young lawyer really had something up his sleeve. Moreover, it was a generous offer. The judicial face thawed a little on defendant's counsel. It then turned to the jury.

"Gentlemen of the jury, I will ask you to retire for a few minutes, to give me an opportunity of deciding whether this evidence is material to the case."

The jury filed out in one direction, and his honor went off in the other, his silken robe billowing behind him. The court room buzzed with an excited whispering.

"What do you suppose is up?"

XXVI

CORVETH brought the veiled woman to the judge's room through another door. "Chambers" was simply a smallish room with a ceiling so lofty that it gave the effect of a box set up on the narrow end. A wide, flat-topped desk filled a great part of the floor space.

His honor, brought down from the eminence of his dais, was revealed as a smallish man with a wise, humane face, much harassed as the result of overwork. In the little room he looked much more human.

He waved the lady to a chair at his right hand. Hackett, with a cynical expression, lounged in a chair by the window. Corveth was too nervous to sit down.

As the lady seated herself, she threw back her veil.

"Miss Broomel!" exclaimed the judge, in surprise. "You have already testified in this case." He looked reproachfully at Corveth. "Did you not tell all you knew?"

Pen slowly shook her head.

"How do you reconcile that with your conscience?"

"I answered all the questions put to me," she said softly. "Mr. Corveth could not ask me about these other matters, because he knew nothing of them."

"But you are acting in the defendant's interest, I assume. Surely his counsel had a right to know what was going on!"

"It was not from any lack of confidence in him," Pen said, with a warm glance at Corveth. "It would have been fatal to us if the least whisper of what we were doing had got about before we had complete proof. We tried our best to obtain a postponement of the trial. When that was denied, it was very difficult to know what to do. Mr. Counsell decided, and I agreed with him, that we must go ahead and keep everything hidden. We did not tell Mr. Corveth, because he is too honest to play a part. If he had known what we knew, our enemies would have read it in his face in the court room. If we have acted wrongly, I hope you will remember that we had a powerful and unscrupulous enemy to deal with."

His honor did not appear greatly impressed, though it could be perceived that he approved of Pen's exterior.

"And do you think you have complete proof now?" he asked with an indulgent smile.

"I obtained it only yesterday, sir."

"Well, tell me what you expect to prove."

Pen looked rather helpless.

"Mr. Corveth said I must be brief, but there is so much to tell, and I scarcely know where to begin."

Corveth prompted her.

"Tell Judge Stockman what witnesses you have brought me, and what you expect to prove by each one."

Pen nodded.

"The first witness will be a young woman named Blanche Paglar. She will testify that up to the day when Collis Dongan was shot she was friends with—I mean lived with—"

Pen hesitated, blushing.

Corveth helped her out with the legal euphemism.

"Yes, she was the common law wife of a young man known as Spike Talley. She will testify that Talley told her at this time that he had undertaken a job for a rich man, whose name he never told her, and that he was to be paid ten thousand dollars for it."

"What?" exclaimed Judge Stockman. "What sort of job?"

"Talley was what is called a gangster, or gunman," said Pen. "When they say 'a job,' they mean a killing—a murder."

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed the judge. "Do you mean to say you have had to associate with such people?"

"They were kind to me," replied Pen simply.

"Go on."

"She will testify that Spike Talley's duties in connection with his 'job' necessitated his putting on dress clothes every evening, and going to a certain fashionable hotel to dine. He never told her the name of the hotel, but on one occasion he brought her a menu card with the name torn off. That card will be identified as one from the Hotel Warrington."

"Ha!" exclaimed his honor, as the connection began to show.

"Talley also told her that his 'boss' gave him a drink of whisky every time he went to his house. He described to her how it stood on the sideboard in a handsome, square, cut-glass bottle, and how he was always invited to help himself."

"The importance of this will appear later," murmured Corveth.

"Blanche will testify," Pen went on, "that Spike Talley left her for the last time on the afternoon of May 27—the day of the murder. Some days later she reported his disappearance to the police. They could find no trace of him, if indeed they ever looked. Blanche never connected his disappearance with the death of Collis Dongan, because the newspapers made out from the beginning that it was certain Mr. Counsell had committed that crime."

His honor was now thoroughly interested in Pen's story. Even the assistant district attorney had lost his scornful air.

"But if this Talley has disappeared," said the judge, "can you *prove* anything?"

"You'll see, sir. The next witness is a taxi-driver who was a friend of Spike Talley's. He will testify that at this time Tal-

ley came to his garage every evening, and engaged the witness to drive him to the Hotel Warrington. I could prove by waiters in the hotel that Talley dined there every evening—they have identified his photograph—but Mr. Corveth says it will hardly be necessary, because the next witness, Mr. Slaughter, would carry more weight. Mr. Slaughter is a gentleman of means and position, who resides at the Warrington. He will tell how he became acquainted with Talley through seeing him dine at the next table. Talley was a young man of much charm of manner, and Mr. Slaughter never suspected what he was. The two became quite friendly, and several times, after dinner, Mr. Slaughter invited Talley up to his apartment, which was on the same floor as Mr. Dongan's and Mr. Counsell's. Mr. Slaughter will further testify how on one occasion he discovered Talley—what would you say?—flirting with the hotel maid on that floor, and remonstrated with him. Talley passed it off with a laugh. Talley visited him for the last time on the night of the murder.

"The next witness will be the maid, Mary Crehan. She will tell how Talley 'made up to her,' as she says, and how on one occasion he took her to a moving-picture theater. It appears from what she recollects of their conversation that Talley was pumping her for information as to the lay-out of Mr. Dongan's and Mr. Counsell's apartments, and as to the habits of the two men. He did this so adroitly that the girl never thought, later, of connecting him with the shooting. She will testify how one evening, after having talked with Talley in the corridor, she missed her keys. It never entered her head that the fashionably dressed young gentleman had anything to do with it. She found them the next night in the cupboard on that floor, where she was accustomed to leave them upon going off duty. The bunch consisted of half a dozen master keys which would admit her to any apartment on that floor.

"The next witness is a locksmith, an acquaintance of Talley's, who will identify the maid's keys as the same bunch brought to him by Talley to be duplicated. He did duplicate them, and handed both sets to Talley. This was about ten days before the murder.

"The next witness is another taxi-driver, who had no acquaintance with Talley, but who is prepared to identify his photograph

as that of a man who engaged him outside the Hotel Warrington about midnight on May 27."

"Midnight?" interrupted Judge Stockman. "That was *after* the murder. Can't you connect this Talley directly with the deed?"

"No, sir. He was too clever. Besides, that was not my principal object. I was looking for proof against his employer."

"Oh, do you know him too?"

Pen nodded.

"Go ahead!"

"This taxi-driver could not at first remember the address to which he had driven Talley, but he gave us the locality, and when we drove with him through the streets of that neighborhood he unhesitatingly picked out the house."

"How could he do that?"

"Well, it was a peculiar-looking house, different from any other in the neighborhood—from any other in town, probably. It is in Thirty-Ninth Street, east of Lexington Avenue."

"Go on!"

"He stalled his engine, and had to get out of his car to start it. Thus he saw Talley admitted to the house, and had a glimpse of the man who admitted him. Out of a number of photographs handed him, he picked out one which he is ready to swear is that of the man who admitted Talley."

"He could have got but the briefest of glances."

"But it is a striking-looking man, your honor."

"What next?"

"Talley was never seen alive after that," Pen said slowly.

"What?" exclaimed Judge Stockman. "You charge a second murder? Go on!"

"For many days we could get no further," Pen said. "Finally one of Talley's friends volunteered to break into that house to look for evidence."

"But this is burglary!"

"The witness, known as Babe Riordan, is prepared to waive immunity when he goes on the stand. If a charge is laid against him, he will stand his trial."

"Did he find anything in the house?"

"He found the square cut-glass whisky bottle on the sideboard. It had been emptied, but we took it to a chemist, our next witness, who is prepared to testify that it contained well defined traces of cyanide."

His honor frowned.

"Dubious evidence!" he said. "Even suppose a jury were inclined to believe the chemist, how would they know but that the last witness—a self-confessed burglar, remember—did not put the poison in the bottle himself?"

"There is more evidence," said Pen. "It appears that according to the law a druggist may not sell such poisons without a doctor's prescription. A search was conducted through the various drug stores in the neighborhood, and several prescriptions for cyanide traced back. One was traced to the man who occupies that house on Thirty-Ninth Street."

"The man identified by the second taxi-driver as he who admitted Talley to the house?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ah, then, you're getting closer to it! Who is this man?"

Pen hesitated.

"Mr. Corveth told me that his name should not be mentioned at this trial."

His honor looked a little nonplused.

"Well, perhaps not—perhaps not! Have you more evidence against him?"

"We can show that three days before the murder he drew ten thousand dollars in cash from the bank."

"Ah, the price named by the first witness! But what good will that do you, if it is your contention that he murdered his tool instead of paying him?"

"Because we can show that on the day after the murder he redeposited the amount in another bank."

"Ah! Anything else?"

"Our next task, of course, was to try to prove what had become of Talley's body. This took us many more days."

"You engaged detectives to help you?"

"No, sir—I hadn't money enough; but Spike Talley's friends helped me. They proved themselves as good detectives as professionals."

"But they are only making out their friend to be a murderer!"

"They seem not to mind that. According to their code, he was simply doing his job. Instead of getting his pay for it, he was murdered. They wish to avenge him by helping to convict his murderer. I might say that if it were not for me, they would probably choose a more direct way of avenging him; but I have persuaded them that it would be a much more terrible

punishment to bring the murderer into court."

His honor wagged his head.

"You have been keeping strange company, young lady!"

"I had no choice, sir."

"I suppose you know that these gunmen, gangsters, burglars, and so on, are not very credible witnesses?"

"They are not my principal witnesses, sir. I rely chiefly on Mr. Houghton, the different professional men, the servants, and the second taxi-driver, all of whom are obviously disinterested."

"Where did you get so much information about what constitutes evidence and so on?"

"We had legal advice, sir—not from Mr. Corveth, but from another lawyer, who once defended Spike Talley."

"Go on!"

"We had the house on Thirty-Ninth Street searched from top to bottom, without discovering any clew as to what became of the body. It was not until we went to Mr.—to the rich man's country place that we began to make progress. We learned there that two days after the murder—that was Sunday—the owner brought a barrel up from the city in the back of his automobile. He informed his servants that it contained a new poison, with which he intended to spray his fruit trees. I should explain that he is an extensive raiser of fruit. Under his supervision the barrel was put in a little shed in one of the orchards, where the spraying apparatus, the poisons, and so on, were kept."

"Can't you establish a connection between the barrel and the house on Thirty-Ninth Street?"

"To a certain extent, yes. When we learned of the barrel, some of us went back to the Thirty-Ninth Street neighborhood to investigate. We have a grocer who will testify that he sold an empty barrel to the man in question, who was particular to see that he got a perfectly fitting head to the barrel. He told the grocer that he wanted to ship some china to his country place. He carried the barrel away in his car."

"Did the grocer know the man who bought the barrel?"

"No, sir, but he can identify the man and describe the car."

"Well, assuming that the barrel contained a body when it arrived at the country place, what became of it after that?"

"We have one of the rich man's laborers to testify to that. On the following day, Monday, this man was ordered to assist his master in one of the orchards. The day is fixed in the man's mind because it was Decoration Day, and he was disappointed of getting a holiday. I should tell you that the rich man personally supervises his orchards, and often works in them himself, so that his actions on this day excited no particular remark among his servants. He ordered the laborer to gather up all the twigs and branches which had been pruned in that particular orchard during the winter, and make one great pile, to be burned. He pointed out a spot of waste ground at a little distance from the trees, where the fire was to be made. He then went away.

"He returned to the orchard when the work was done. He then had a small can of oil. His laborer ventured to remonstrate with him on the danger of making so large a fire, but his master curtly replied that he knew what he was about. He sent the laborer on an errand to a distant part of the estate, saying that he would remain to watch the fire. After this rebuke—perhaps with a natural hope that the fire would get beyond his master's control—the laborer, instead of leaving the place, concealed himself behind some shrubbery at a little distance, and watched.

"He saw his master go to the spraying house, bring out the barrel—he will testify that there was no other barrel of that sort in the house—and roll it down the orchard to the great heap of branches. He saw him place it in the center of the pile, pour oil all around, and set it afire. When the flames sprang up, the master began to look about him suspiciously, and the laborer, fearing discovery, hastened away and saw no more. He told what he had seen to his mates, but it does not appear that any of them suspected that a crime had been committed. Their master's actions so frequently appeared arbitrary and eccentric that they never tried to explain them. As one of them said, 'You never knew what the boss was going to do next.'"

"Have you anything more?" asked the judge.

"Yes, sir. I will be the next witness. I will tell how the laborer took me to the spot where the fire had been, and how I searched it. Several weeks had elapsed, and the rains had leached out the ashes,

but the place had not been disturbed by a rake or cultivator."

"How do you know?"

"In the center, where the heat had been greatest, there was nothing but washed out ashes; but all around the edge were the unconsumed ends of twigs and branches, looking as if they had been arranged in an exact circle, with the charred ends pointing to the center. I searched every square inch of the spot while the laborer watched me."

"Where was the master of the place?"

"Oh, I took care to inform myself beforehand that he was not going to be there at that time."

"And you found—"

"Some little burned lumps of bone, but it was impossible to say what bones they were; a little lump of gold that might have been a finger ring—Talley wore such a ring, but it had melted into a shapeless lump; a piece of scorched fabric barely recognizable as part of the brim of a man's silk hat; and finally, in a slight depression where water had gathered, part of a jawbone, in which six teeth were still fairly intact."

The judge shook his head, frowning.

"Scarcely conclusive! Scarcely conclusive!" he said.

"There is one more witness, sir," said Pen. "A good deal of dental work had been done on the teeth, and the fillings were still intact. One of the teeth, it appeared, was false, and it had been fastened to its fellows on either side in an ingenious fashion."

"Ha!"

"Talley, it appeared, was vain of his personal appearance, and employed a first-class dentist. The dentist is prepared to go on the stand and swear from the work on the teeth that this is a part of Talley's jaw."

"From memory?"

"No, sir. He is a modern dentist. He will offer his record in evidence, which includes diagrams of the man's mouth, showing the work he did on it from time to time."

Judge Stockman, forgetting judicial calm, jumped up.

"Ha! Then you *have* a case!" he cried.

"Eh, Mr. Hackett?"

"If it can be proved to the satisfaction of a jury," said the assistant district attorney sourly.

Judge Stockman paced slowly up and down.

"This is extraordinary—most extraordinary!" he murmured. He came to a stand in front of Pen. "Miss Broome, has the man been in court?"

"No, sir, but his representatives are always present. I don't doubt that he receives hourly reports of the proceedings."

"I think you had better tell me the name of the man you accuse," said the judge; "not with any idea of injecting it into this case, but simply that precautions may be taken against his escape. The police should be notified."

Pen looked at Corveth, who nodded.

"It is Ernest Riever," she said.

The effect on the two men was electrical. Hackett jumped to his feet, and supported himself with a hand on the back of his chair.

"Impossible!" he cried.

Judge Stockman, in his amazement, was staring at Pen almost clownishly.

"Ernest Riever!" he stammered. "Ernest Riever! Have you thought of what you are saying?"

A little flame of indignation was lighted in Pen's cheeks.

"If he did it, does it make any difference who he is?"

"Certainly not! Certainly not! But Riever! We must be very sure! This would cause the greatest sensation of our time!"

"Best to proceed very slowly, sir," said Hackett, pale with agitation.

"I have nothing to do with it," said Judge Stockman, with undisguised relief.

"My duty is simply to try Counsell. The rest is up to the district attorney."

"No motive has been established," declared Hackett.

"True! True!" The judge turned almost accusingly to Pen. "What possible reason could Riever have had?"

Corveth answered for her.

"I take it that it is not necessary to go into Riever's motives in this trial; but we are prepared to show a motive, just the same. Do you remember the Riever divorce case three years ago?"

"Dimly."

"There was a countersuit, and Mrs. Riever won. Riever's case rested principally on a letter that he produced in court. It had been written by Mrs. Riever to some unnamed man. We can show that it had been written to Counsell, and that Riever knew it had."

The judge stared.

"Then your contention is that Riever had this inoffensive man Dongan killed merely to enable him to get his revenge on Counsell?"

"There is more evidence on that point, besides what Miss Broome has brought out here. I don't need to point out to you how nearly Riever succeeded in his object."

"Good God!" exclaimed Judge Stockman, horrified.

"That would be something new in criminal jurisprudence," sneered Hackett.

"But not entirely unprecedented," corrected the breathless judge. "There was the famous Anstey case, so often quoted when I was a young lawyer. Of more recent years we've had the cases of 'the people *versus* Reichardt' and 'the people *versus* Bowley.' Good God! Riever!"

The little judge seemed to have been brought to a complete stand. He stared ahead of him, muttering:

"Ernest Riever! Good God! What a sensation it will make!"

"That is all Miss Broome had to tell you, sir," Corveth said.

It brought the judge to himself with a start.

"To be sure! To be sure!" he replied, and cleared his throat. He looked his age.

"I will adjourn court until to-morrow morning. Mr. Hackett, you will get in touch with the police, I suppose. If I were you, I would not take more than one man into my confidence—say Inspector Durdan, of the Detective Bureau."

Hackett bowed in acquiescence.

"Gentlemen, let us return to the court room."

XXVII

On July 27 the following news item appeared in the *New York Courier*:

At 3.40 this afternoon Ernest Riever was found dead in a house he occasionally occupied on East Thirty-Ninth Street. He had shot himself through the head.

The sensational developments in the Counsell case during the past two days were brought to a still more sensational conclusion this afternoon, when Ernest Riever was discovered to have killed himself. Ever since yesterday morning it has been an open secret around town that Riever was the unnamed millionaire so often referred to in the new evidence brought forward in Counsell's defense. It now appears that Riever has been under the surveillance of the police for three days, and this afternoon detective officers were sent to the above address to arrest him. Their ringing at the door elicited no response, and as the men who

had been detailed to trail Riever insisted that he was in the house, an entrance was forced.

Mr. Riever was discovered lying in his dining room with an automatic pistol in his hand. There was nobody else in the house. He had held the pistol under his chin, pointing upward. There was smoke in the room, and the body was warm, indicating that the deed was done as the officers rang the bell. Death was instantaneous. So ends one of the strangest stories that has ever come to light in our courts.

Mr. Riever's self-inflicted death renders the acquittal of Counsell merely a matter of form. It is said that the district attorney will now make no effort to refute the testimony tending to show that Collis Dongan was shot by an agent acting under Riever's instructions. The jurors are expected to bring in a verdict without leaving their seats.

XXVIII

"DON'T drive so fast, Don! It makes my hair rise, the way you take these curves!"

"I'll try to remember. Lord, but it's good to have an accelerator under your big toe again! This lil ol' bus is about all I own, Pen!"

"You'll soon get a fresh start, now. You're driving just as fast as ever!"

"Sorry! I feel as if that mob was still behind us. Wasn't it ghastly?"

"But they were friendly!"

"Oh, friendly! Three days ago they would just as soon have strung me up to a lamp-post. I could feel it in the court room."

"Well, don't you suppose it was a feeling that they had been unjust to you that made them cheer so loudly to-day when you appeared?"

"I hope so. I don't trust mobs. Lord, when I came out and saw them massed in the street from curb to curb—thousands of them—I could feel myself turning pea green! I had no idea that I had become so famous."

"They have been reading about nothing else for days."

"What a lot of idle people there must be in New York!"

"I don't think it's idleness, altogether; but nothing ever happens to them. They only live in the newspapers."

"A good many cars followed us out of town. When they saw which way we were heading, I suppose they'll wire the news, and cheering crowds will be waiting for us."

"Oh, Don!"

"I'll fool 'em! I'll circle around outside Philadelphia and all the big towns."

"It's horribly immoral, our running off together in a car!"

"What do morals matter, after what we've been through together? We couldn't get married in New York with that mob at our heels. We can get hitched up wherever we happen to stop, I suppose."

"You take it coolly!"

"I take it as a matter of course. Shouldn't I?"

"I don't want to be rushed into it."

"Pen! Have you any doubts of me?"

"No! How can you say such a thing?"

"Then what is it? What brings the tears to your eyes, dearest?"

"Nothing! Only I want to be quiet when I am married. I want to be quiet. Things are still roaring about me!"

"Would you like me to take you home first?"

"No—I don't want you to leave me."

"What is it, dearest? You say it's immoral, our going away together, but you don't want to marry me yet. I mustn't leave you, either!"

"Oh, don't expect me to talk reasonably! I don't want to talk. Marry me whenever you like, but don't talk about it. I just want to be quiet—with you!"

"Suits me! I know a little place in the Virginia foothills. Oh, my Pen! Look behind us!"

"Why?"

"Is there anybody in sight?"

"No."

"I'm going to stop for a moment. Do you realize that I haven't kissed you yet?"

THE END

A LOVER'S SONG

STILL while the light endures,
Still while the face is yours,
Still shall I see and hear;
And still shall life be dear,
And still the fight go on,
Belovèd one!

Richard Leigh

The Bottle of Barzanski

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE — THE STORY OF AN AMERICAN'S
STRANGE QUEST IN A REMOTE PROVINCE OF RUSSIA

By John Kimberly Mumford

I KNEW old Remy went to mass on Sunday, but during all the rest of the week, I believe, his god was the still wine of France. At night, in the Café des Cygnes, he was a priest, and we about the discolored old table his acolytes.

When he came up out of the cellarway, his helper bearing a lighted candle before him, one knew from the reverent way he carried the basket, moving with slow, measured step and softly, that the bottle, cob-webbed and breathing the mustiness of long-cellaried glass, was a proper object of veneration. He would set it down gently on the board, to let it find in its own good time the warmth of the mellow old room. Then he would blow out the candle and wait with folded arms.

Time was not counted in his ministry. Every bottle worthy of his service he thought entitled to the tribute of perfect temperature. When at last it came, it shed into the air the cool scent of old vineyards and stirred in the memory a far-off echo of vintage songs.

"Very nice!" said the Russian at my elbow.

When I looked, he had tasted the wine and put it down, and sat smiling at me—a quiet, tolerant smile.

"Rather," I said shortly and with some resentment.

He was a discordant note in our sympathy.

"*Monsieur*"—he continued to smile—"you are an amateur, and you know; but if you will forgive my saying so, you have yet to taste the wine of Barzanski!"

At first I flared up; then I was ashamed of it. The man was probably a homesick patriot. It was his heart that was talking, not his tongue—certainly not a discerning palate; and I forgave him.

"I have always felt," I said with studied amiability, "that the wines of Lafitte, in the best bloom of their age, were almost the best thing any one could possess."

"But," he persisted, "if you will not misunderstand me, *monsieur*, that is because you have yet to know the wine of Barzanski."

It was no use. The man was impossible, with his Barzanski, which no doubt was as harsh as it sounded—certainly not fit to be mentioned in the presence of the best vintage of France.

Barzanski—what a word! His beard seemed blacker, his teeth whiter, and he looked down at the glass, barely touched, still smiling reminiscently, like one in the spell of a pleasant dream. All about him were idolaters content in their devotion to what was to him only a minor deity.

But it is a poor wine that will not make a kind man kindlier. With the second glass I had clean forgotten his offending. After all, there was a link between us, and what is worthy of any man's loyalty cannot be lightly despised. Besides, the name would not out. Barzanski—it kept saying itself over. It had a liquid quality, and in his foreign speech, mellowed no doubt by his feeling, there was a seductive softness in its syllables.

"It is a long time," he said, "since I have tasted Barzanski. Russia has been closed to me for many years."

I understood. In those days Paris was full of his kind. My sympathy grew, and with it my curiosity.

"What is it like, if you remember?"

"Oh, I remember very well! One can neither forget nor describe it. I have always believed it was the vine of Barzanski that kept Alexander in Asia and made Jamshid immortal. Perhaps Jason, too,

sought something besides the Golden Fleece."

I looked at him sharply. My own name is Jason. His face showed no sign of consciousness.

"But why," I asked, "is there none in Paris?"

"Paris!" He raised his black eyebrows and shrugged his shoulders. "The French have something to sell. They bring the peasant Kahete of my Caucasus overland into France to give bouquet to their most expensive Burgundies, just as the Italian Piedmont imparts the fragrant body to their clarets; but the Barzanski never leaves its native Russia. There is never too much of it."

This was new lore to me. When I reached my lodgings, I was saying this strange name over. It had grown to be like rippling music. It gurgled through my imagination enticingly until I went to sleep.

In the night I had a dream, which persisted until dawn, of a woman, gray, with a sad, beautiful face. In spite of the poets, I count dreaming about women no great diversion; but this one simply would not go away. She was walking and walking and walking, slowly, among great trees, weeping silently. The tears as they fell were like crystal, but she caught them, one by one, in a bottle of ancient glass of curious workmanship.

Presently I saw that the tears, which had come almost to fill the bottle, were turned to blood. As she passed, I could discern letters in the glass. At last, after long effort, I made them out, and the word they spelled was "Barzanski."

After breakfast I found myself folding my clothing, packing my trunks, without any possible reason that I could assign, and—briefly, I bought a ticket for the morning train for Moscow.

It was absurd. I could not have told why I did it; but in those days the world was an open road to me, and somewhere by the way my curiosity would be satisfied. I went to sleep that night with the rails singing one monotonous song as the train trundled along toward Russia.

II

In Moscow I went straight to the hotel and spent an hour dressing, as expectant and fussy as a nervous bridegroom. I found the best table in the dining room, and

ordered a generous and, I thought, an admirably devised dinner around the wine.

"And now," I said to the waiter, "bring me a bottle of Barzanski of the best year you have, and—"

I never finished.

"We do not know such a wine."

He said it quickly—rather too quickly. I looked up. The man had gone white.

"That is strange," I said. "I have been told it is the greatest wine in Russia."

"I know nothing about that, sir," he replied brusquely. "Here is the card of wines."

He handed me the familiar old list—French, German, Hungarian, Italian—yes, even the dry mountain stuff of the Swiss cantons, all with the vintage years in columns and the schedule of rubles and kopecks over against them.

I called the *maitre d'hôtel*. He too shook his head and tried, as waiters will the world over, to make me despise myself; but in the back of the man's head, I could see, there was fear, or something akin to it. He made haste to walk away from my table.

My enthusiasm had gone flat. I ordered a known brand of Moselle to mend my feelings, and faith I needed something. It was seldom I drank beyond the point of appreciation. That night I believe I did; and I sat a long time thinking what a fool I had been. The Russian must have been making game of me.

At times I was furious at having been so easy a dupe; and yet in fairness I could not believe it. I wanted to be just, but I went to sleep wondering, though considerably fuddled, whether the man who sent me on this wild-goose chase was merely that cheapest of clowns, a practical joker, or a dreamer living in his dreams. There were all sorts in that jumbled world of Paris.

Next morning I saw the manager, and in the first minute I knew that he too was frightened. He put a brave face on it, and said with a wink:

"*Monsieur* dined *en monarque* last night, but—a few hours, and, like a cabbage, a drinker grows a new head."

"Very amusing," I said, "but that does not explain why—"

"My dear sir!" His grin vanished, he drew himself up, and I saw his hands close tightly. "It seems you are possessed of some notion about a wine of which we know nothing—nothing, I tell you. There may

be some such thing—I do not know; but I say to you, sir, that you must seek for it elsewhere."

With that he excused himself and left me standing stupidly. He, a servant in a public house, had practically handed me my passports! The cause must be something more than trivial.

I am a stubborn man, though far from a combative one. Of course I could live without this Barzanski, if indeed there was such a thing, but it was paramount that, having started to get it, I should either have it or know that it did not exist. During the day I visited a dozen cafés and wine shops. Everywhere they looked at me with suspicion, in some places with manifest dread, and got rid of me with what haste and politeness they could.

It all served one purpose. I had been keen to taste the Barzanski. What possessed me now was a mulish determination to know what lay behind all this pretense and denial.

The Russian had spoken of "his Caucasus." Evidently the Barzanski was a home-brew to him; and so, gathering my effects again, I boarded a train for Tiflis. It was an old trail to me, and after a dozen years I was glad enough to travel it once more. I might find Barzanski and I might not, but it would be a change, and perhaps I should bump into John Sanborn.

After we left college John and I had just drifted apart. He had got mixed up with the German oil interests, and had been living in the Caucasus. Bub Clapsattle, the class gossip, had tried in the early morning stages of a class reunion to tell me something about John's having been severely jolted in a love affair; but I was very hazy about the details.

It was toward evening when I got into Tiflis. I had suggested Barzanski at various eating houses along the way, but had met with so much aversion that at the end of it I wondered if I had been heralded as a bearer of pestilence.

I found nothing changed in Tiflis. The Hôtel de Londres, sole refuge of the sophisticated wayfarer, still stood, an unlovely old barrack, perched over the River Kur, which with its deep gorge divides the town. In the European quarter the lights were as abundant and bright as ever, the cabs as multitudinous, and the smug German landlord beamed at the door of his inn. In those days almost all the hotels, from

one end of Russia to the other, were kept by Germans. One can understand, now, the reason why.

The Grand Duke Michael was governor of the province, with two hundred thousand soldiers scattered through it. For well-nigh a century the Caucasus had been a furnace of unrest, and it required a strong hand, as well as unceasing vigilance and a rare quality of tact, to keep the lid on. There was never any telling at what minute the wild country would burst into the flames of open revolt.

A gay capital was Tiflis—on one side, at least—with the flare of the lights, the opera in full swing, and a night life that made Paris seem slow and even prudish. The Londres blazed with gold lace and fairly jingled with the sound of martial harness. Gorgeous officers ate their way from end to end of the long table that stood banked with *zakoushka*, paying only a copper or two for the vodka that accompanied the food; then, with coffee at table for two kopecks, and two more kopecks for the waiter—and they had dined.

The thrifty German boniface wrung his hands and wailed:

"*Mein Gott, vot can I do? Dey are beautiful, dis army, and dey are eading der roof off mein haus!*"

When I had found a place in the crowded barn of a dining room, I called for a bottle of Barzanski with my dinner. There was instant consternation. Curious looks were directed at me from all sides. The landlord came, with a face the color of putty, and nervously assured me that he didn't know what I meant.

Some officers at the adjoining table evidently knew. They all turned and stared at me. One tittered, whereat another—a huge, handsome fellow of thirty, with the insignia of a colonel—started angrily from his chair. His neighbor pressed him back. The colonel made some observation in Russian, which was not loud enough for me to hear, though I understand their villainous speech fairly well; and the flurry passed off in laughter. But he was ripe for trouble, and shot black glances at me until, having finished an uncomfortable and disappointing meal, I lit a cigar and wandered out on the broad veranda that overhangs the river.

The thing was getting past endurance. That there was Barzanski was plain enough; but what devil was there in the

stuff that made men go dumb and palsied at the mention of it, and paved the way to it with such a world of lying?

"Who," I asked the landlord, "is that lovely soldier man who was going to eat me in the dining room?"

"Why," he stammered, "why, that's Prince Dmitri. He is very excitable, and he doesn't understand English very well. He must have misunderstood something you said to me."

"More lies!" I reflected.

I strolled down the brightly lighted street. After a time I found myself wandering beyond the Kur, among the medieval ways of the old town. Before a dimly lighted shop lay a huge wine skin, evidently that of a bullock, highly varnished, the ancient sign of the merchandise sold within. Thinking that here, perhaps, I might be able to find the truth, if not the Barzanski, I entered.

Out of the gloom of the shop appeared an old Georgian, in the cap and long-skirted coat of his kind. He greeted me with the hopeful politeness of shopkeepers, bowing up and down from his waist, and rubbing his hands nervously.

"The gentleman wishes a wine? It should be something out of the ordinary. Kahete? No, that is for the multitude. Kavkas? Too harsh for a refined taste. Perhaps I might suggest—"

I leaned forward in the most accusing manner I could master, and, looking him hard in the eye, whispered:

"What, my man, if I should ask you to produce a bottle of Barzanski?"

The effect was electrical. He cried out sharply and threw up both hands, as if to ward me away. For once I had no heart. It is not easy for a good-natured soul measuring five feet four, and tending to obesity, to look like the Day of Judgment; but I had suffered much. It was my turn to bully somebody, and I spared the old wine merchant not at all.

"Answer!" I said stonily.

"I have not! I have not!" he protested. "I am innocent! Are you of the police? Who has made this charge? Who is my enemy?"

He waited for no reply. Fearing to check the course of revelation, I kept silence, which seemed to goad him to despair.

"I have no witness!" he groaned. "It is always so. Wife, child, and now I must go, too, in the night, and with no one near

to see. At last there will be an end of the Davidoffs. Why is it? What have we done?"

Truly, Barzanski was developing its sensations. The old fellow's misery was so abject and so clearly genuine that I pitied him, but the goal was in sight, and I could no more have desisted than I could drink dry, alone and unaided, the million-bottled cellars of Rheims.

This man had the secret of Barzanski. I alone had it not. He had taken me for a member of the secret police. He should continue to do so, if it would help to lift the curtain that shut me out.

"What," I demanded sternly, "is all this babble about wife and child? I am asking you nothing of wives and children. We seek the wine of Barzanski."

"But I haven't it, sir—God knows I haven't it! Search my poor place again. There is not a single drop. I gave it all!"

"Gave it? To whom?"

I was feeling my way in the dark. Old Davidoff looked at me curiously, then seemed to give up hope, and sagged down weakly.

"I beg of you don't mock me, sir. I am only a simple man, and one sorrow after another has weakened my wits. There is no worthy sport to be had in torturing me. Here is the place—it is yours. If you find one drop of that nectar, take me to the punishment. I have nothing left to live for!"

"Nectar!" I repeated. "You like the Barzanski, then?"

"Like it?" he echoed. "One bottle of it is worth all the advertised slops of Europe. You may put me in prison, if you will, but I will say it. When the Barzanski was taken away, the sunshine passed out of life; and to think there was ever a time when even common people could drink it like water!"

At this picture I was forced to draw out a handkerchief and wipe my lips. Without knowing it, the fellow was taking the tuck all out of me. He was speaking my language. With such a man I need no longer play the rôle of a scurvy police ferret, which ill suited my palate.

"Davidoff," I said, "you may put your fears away. I am no police spy. I am not even a Russian, but only a faithful lover of wine, from a far country. I have come all the way from Paris, hoping to get a taste of this famed Barzanski, and at every step of

the road I have found men frightened out of their wits at the mere name of it. It doesn't take two pairs of eyes to see that you are honest, and that you have suffered. A man who has reverence for a perfect wine is not one to mistrust a proffer of friendship in his adversity?"

He stared at me, speechless as a fish.

"God!" was all he said.

Then he leaned his gray head down on his arms on the shabby, wine-stained counter, and for a minute shook with sobs. I let him go on. By and by he pulled himself together. As I expected, the outburst had steadied him.

"Forgive me, sir," he said brokenly. "It is a far cry, to a heartbroken man, from the threat of Siberia to the comfort of a friendly word. The world is a strange pudding. Are you in haste, sir?"

"Only to penetrate the mystery of Barzanski," I told him. "All my life is at leisure for that."

"Then, sir, if you will come with me, I will tell you what there is to know."

III

HE led the way into a dingy rear room, with low, beamed ceiling black with age. From the wall there looked out, with a grandiose expression oddly out of keeping, the pictured faces of three Romanoffs. Begging me to be seated, the old man went out, and, after a few minutes, returned, bringing a dust-crusted bottle.

"By rights," he said, "this should be Barzanski, but I told you the truth when I said I had none. This, however, which has lain here, in wood and glass, for sixty odd years, since my father's time, you will find worth drinking."

He opened the bottle with great care and poured it slowly, as a wise man does. Then he sat himself down facing me.

"Sir," he said, "there are those who clamor against wine, but it has its uses. Do you get the bouquet of this? It is an unceasing marvel to me that so harsh a land as this Caucasus should carry in its breast some memory of all the flowers, to lend fragrance to the vine it nourishes."

He spoke with earnestness, sniffing from time to time to catch the aroma, which hung heavy in the room.

"Now," he said, "you may have some faint notion of what the Barzanski was. It's only a faint notion, for between even this uncommon mark and the wine of Bar-

zanski there is a gulf as wide as the world, though the estates are only a few leagues apart. There is no use in trying to tell about Barzanski. Even if there were words in the language, no memory could translate them into that unforgettable flavor."

Even with his delectable old bottle under my very nose, he was driving me into the madness of thirst. Like a man who sees beauty only in the one woman he desires, without Barzanski I had no wine.

"But for God's sake, man, come to the point!" I cried. "What has become of it? Has the vineyard died? Was it flood, fire, or earthquake?"

"More irrevocable than all these," he replied gravely. "Every known bottle of Barzanski is locked in the imperial cellars in St. Petersburg. So long as Russia is Russia, no drop of it will ever again wet any lips save those of the house of Romanoff and their friends."

It was a heavy sentence, and a dismal ending, I thought, to an adventure that had started out so bravely. The future looked gray and empty. The noble bottle the old man had brought out to honor me stood like an unheeded beggar. I had lost interest in it.

When I looked up, he stood shaking his head in regret.

"I shouldn't have told you how wonderful it was," he said with simple feeling; "but the whole story is wonderful, though perhaps you would not care to hear it."

"Yes, yes!" I cried. "Tell it to me. It is all I shall ever get, and I have come three thousand miles to hear it."

At that moment, I give you my word, I was casting about in my mind for some seed of a plan that would unlock for me the imperial cellars on the Neva.

"It is very Russian, this story," said Davidoff. "When the old Prince Alexis Barzanski died, and young Dmitri came into the estates—"

"Dmitri?" I halted him; "Dmitri? I begin to get a glimpse through the grindstone. Is this Dmitri a soldier?"

"Dmitri is a colonel of hussars, and they call him the handsomest and the wildest soldier in the Russian army."

"Then by rights he should be a giant with a black beard and an eye like a bald eagle."

"That would probably be he, if you add the heart of a hyena and the morals of a Yamudi boar."

"I seem to recognize Dmitri. So he is the Barzanski! No wonder he wriggled. Go on with the story."

"He has an evil reputation," continued Davidoff; "and he has earned it, though he is, as you might say, only a limb from the tree. Old Prince Alexis was worse rather than better. When he died in the fullness of his sins, Dmitri declared that he was going to wash the slate and put the past behind him. Nobody believed it would come true, for there's a devil in the blood. It didn't; but while the fit was on, Dmitri married an Englishwoman with a great fortune, part of it inherited from a Russian mother. There was some mystery about it. They said she was in love with some one else, but only the great world knew anything about that. It was a wonderful wedding—the most magnificent, men said, that ever was seen outside the imperial family. There were gifts of immense value, and great nobles came from all parts of Europe, for the Barzanski are not small people. At the feast the wine of the ancestral vineyards flowed without stint. Even the peasants got drunk on it."

I could only groan, and I did.

"The story of it went back to Europe," Davidoff went on. "That was not all. The grand duke sent some of the wine to his imperial majesty. Whether the Little Father—whom may God preserve!—had a discerning taste, or whether he was angered by the account of such abuse, he wasted no time in scolding, but confiscated the Barzanski estates."

"The whole thing?" I gasped.

"The whole thing—vineyard, winery, cellars, and all. There has been no such earthquake in the Caucasus for a hundred years. He might as well have tumbled our mountains into the Caspian. Worse still, the imperial edict forbade any person to have in his possession, to drink or sell, or even to give away, a bottle of the wine, and the penalty—"

"What was the penalty?" I asked, keenly curious. I had come to the point where it seemed as if life without Barzanski was a futile thing. "Is it death?"

"Only a shade better—Siberia for life. You understand why I was frightened when you asked me for Barzanski."

"Quite. And how did the gentle Dmitri take it?"

"He had no recourse. A word of protest, and he would have gone to the mines

himself; but if the estates are gone, the Barzanski devil is still alive and active. Dmitri has been like a poison flame ever since. His rancor centers on the grand duke, whom he regards as the author of his misfortune. For his wife, they say, he has made life a torment. He is a genius in iniquity, a scandal fresh every hour; and to those at his mercy he is cruelty personified. How many men in his regiment have found death easier than the service, nobody knows. My own son, sir, was one."

"Your son?" Truly, I thought, this was a strange jumble! How strange it was I had still to learn.

"Yes," he replied gravely. "That is part of my sorrow; but let me finish the story. At first, people couldn't credit it; but when the searchers went everywhere throughout the empire, hunting in the hotels and wine shops, and even in private cellars, they saw that it was no jest. The work was done thoroughly—so thoroughly that I do not believe a single bottle can have escaped them. Barzanski has simply vanished from the knowledge of common men. So," he concluded, "perhaps we had better find solace in the best substitute that is left."

Thus reminded, I drained my glass, for I was low in spirit. With a look of commiseration he deftly filled it again—for which I was not ungrateful.

"The best that is left!" he repeated, in a voice that had changed timbre in a few seconds.

I looked up. He had set down the bottle and stood staring at—or rather through—the wall, with the fingers of one hand thrust into his mat of gray hair, like a man dazed from a blow.

"The best that is left!" Again the words came from him as from a sleepwalker. "Good God!" he cried, stiffening suddenly. "What is left?"

It was with difficulty that I kept my seat. So swift and so violent was the change in him that I was sure that I was alone in that impossible place with a paranoiac. In that instant his mania had seized him.

Indeed, engaging as his narrative had been, I had been conscious, all through its telling, of some duality in him. This calm, courteous old man had been, only a few minutes before, a wild-eyed creature, swept by a storm of weeping at the discovery that I was not a policeman. It had come to me

a moment before, as I watched him pouring the wine, that his own story might be as strange as that of the Barzanski; but I little knew, nor at that moment did he, how closely the two were interwoven, or through what a maze of tragic incident they were to pass together to their ending.

He seemed to have forgotten my existence, and started violently when I stepped over and put my hand on his shoulder.

"Davidoff," I said, in as even a voice as I could command, "you have forgotten that I am your friend, and you need one. Don't let your misfortune eat your heart out. To fight trouble, a man needs to be at his best."

"At his best!" he scoffed. "There is no best for me. I am scourged from one torture to another. You think I am mad, and you are not far wrong. There is just one thing left. Kind God, let me find the wretch that took her! I'll let the life out of him, if he were higher than—"

He was getting wild again. I turned away, took up the bottle, and filled his empty glass. He watched me narrowly.

"You know how to pour wine," he said, with a note of admiration.

I resumed my seat. The appeal to his courtesy was not to be denied. He sank into his chair quietly enough, and, though I noticed that his hand still shook, he took up the quaint old glass, nodded to me, and drank avidly. The wine, or the diversion, or perhaps both, seemed to quiet him.

"Your counsel is both kind and wise," he said. "I should like you to know that my sorrows are not mere imaginings. I have nursed them so long that they are burning me out. People look on me as deranged, and perhaps I am so. What I have undergone is sufficient cause, and the suspense and the silence and my utter helplessness have made it worse.

"My father was a self-respecting man. He gave me a good education. My wife was gentleness personified, and beautiful beyond the lot of most women. We had a son, and three years later a daughter. Our life was cloudless. One night, when I had been kept here late, I went home, to find the house dark and still. The children were asleep in their upper chamber, but of my wife there was no trace. She had gone suddenly, for her sewing was still on the chair where she had dropped it, and her hat and coat were in their place. No one had seen her, or heard any sound of her going.

She had simply vanished into the silence of Russia, where cries are swallowed up and have no answer."

For a long minute the old man sat without a word. Then, by an effort, he roused himself.

"You are a man of feeling," he said. "I need not tell you what the succeeding years were to me. To this day I have had no word of her. I do not know whether she is alive or dead. At last I came to recognize it as the dispensation of fate. My life was devoted to rearing the two children to be what I knew she would have made them. The boy, when his time came, went to the army. He had his lieutenancy, he was handsome and bright and fine. He was a victim of the studied cruelty of the devil Barzanski. Again I was stricken, and again there was no redress. What is a bourgeois lieutenant?"

"Well, the girl Sonia was left, a wondrous creature, with her mother's beauty and more, and a spirit as exquisite as the dew of the morning. I am not going to sing her praises, for you would only count it part of my delusion; but let me assure you, sir, all the time she was growing up to womanhood, as I watched her marvelous beauty unfolding, it became more of a torture. There was always the shadow of what had gone before. I could not free myself from the haunting fear that she was too fair to escape the eyes of the vultures."

As he concluded, the old man controlled himself by a great effort, his face gray with pain.

"God pity me, she was! No, God pity her, I should say. Oh, my Sonia, my little girl, my little girl!"

His grief would have wrenched a harder heart than mine. He sat staring into emptiness, clutching the arms of his chair in his manful struggle to master his feelings, and with tears trickling down his ashen face. At last he turned to me.

"Mr.—"

"Hunter is my name—Jason Hunter."

"A Russian doesn't have to wonder, Mr. Hunter, what became of her—of both of them. Their beauty marked them as prey for those who have power to take and hands ready at their bidding to despoil any man's home. These are the thoughts that drive sleep from me, and make death seem so easy and so welcome. I should seek it as my dear boy did, if I did not still cherish the old Georgian longing for vengeance. I

struggle to hold fast to my reason, in the belief that some day my hour will come!"

IV

THERE was a sound in the outer room. I heard the front door close. Composing himself as best he could, Davidoff went out.

Through the opening, as I poured for myself another glass of wine, I saw a woman, tall but slightly stooped, evidently no longer young. She wore a heavy *bourka*—a long felt cape that buckles at the neck—and her head and face were hidden by a coarse peasant shawl, which wrapped her shoulders and fell like a deep hood. From beneath the *bourka* she drew two empty magnums, held by a split strap.

"Fill me these, merchant, with red wine that one may swallow and not die," she commanded.

While Davidoff did her bidding, I observed that she watched him narrowly. Once she started toward him, as if with some sudden purpose; then she halted and stood, fairly in the glow of the lamp, waiting for her bottles.

When he brought them, neatly wiped and corked, she handed forth some rubles in payment. The old man started to make change.

"You may keep the kopecks," she said; "but," she added, in a harsh whisper, "if right were right, you would give me this wine for nothing!"

"I must live, madam," returned Davidoff.

"For what, pray? There are things dearer than life."

She was bending forward, gazing hard at him from under the shadow of her shawl.

"What—what do you mean?" he cried.

"Daughters, for example—wives, by chance. How say you—have I earned the wine?"

For an instant he hung dumb. Then the tempest seized him. He burst into a hysterical laugh.

"Stop!" he shouted, as she started to move away. "Are you mocking me?"

"It would scarcely be worth a journey," she replied.

"Then tell me, in God's name, where is she?"

"I go to her," came the terse answer.

As she turned toward the door, the flap of her *bourka* fell back. In the lamp's glare I noticed that the gown underneath her coarse, workwoman's wrap was of fine ma-

terial, and that her boots were of the better quality.

In a moment she was gone.

"Hunter, Hunter!" cried out Davidoff. "Come quickly! We are going to Sonia! We are going—"

He was like a man gone daft, as he may well have been. Rushing to a high shelf, he took down a huge key and thrust it into the door. Then he pushed me into the street and closed all behind him, holding a nervous watch meanwhile on the muffled figure of the woman, who was moving rapidly away through the glare of one murky light after another.

He rushed after her like a coursing whippet. Two or three times, as he went on, I had to caution him to keep his distance, so as not to attract attention.

It was a long and winding way she led us—through many streets, and at last out into the quiet suburbs and over a lonely road running toward the mountains. By and by we came to a high wall, among trees, surrounding a tall house.

Here the woman waited till we came up with her. She drew us through the shadows along the wall to a low doorway, through which she ushered us into a wooded garden of generous expanse. Davidoff maintained a grim silence, but I could hear his heavy breathing, and with his pitiable story fresh in mind I knew what silence cost him.

Threading our way among the trees and shrubbery, we came near to the house, and hid ourselves, sprawled among the bushes, in a spot where we had a view of the door, the driveways, and the long walk leading to the principal entrance. As she left us, to retrace her way through the thick greenery, the woman leaned over and whispered to Davidoff:

"No matter what you see, remember that a sound is your passport to a better world. If you want revenge, hold your tongue, and live to get it!"

She was gone.

The night was cool, with the autumnal tang that foretells the swift-coming Asiatic winter. Light shone out through chinks in the shutters. It was evidently a festal night, for now and then came the echo of an uproarious song. Down at the gate we could hear the pawing and stamping of restless horses and the low, grumbling voices of men.

As I lay there, many things passed through my mind. What, I wondered, were

my comfortable friends in the Cygnes doing now? I could picture their calm, critical discussion over the third bottle, which should just about now be making its appearance, their quiet talk and laughter, and their endless speculation over what had become of the second oldest member of the circle, for I had disappeared without a word to any one. I wondered if the Russian would still be there. Most of all I wondered, and without much hope, whether I should ever be able to confirm his praise of the Barzanski. It seemed a far way back to the Cygnes, for these were perilous paths I was treading, and God knew if I should ever see the quiet Seine again.

One fantastic speculation led to another, and my thoughts wandered far afield. Though the ground was chilly, I was not uncomfortable. The wine I had drunk in the old man's shop may have left its effect, for these vintages of the Caucasus are not without substance; but however it may be, I think I must have fallen asleep—which would certainly have amused my friends at the Cygnes.

Davidoff's fierce clutch on my wrist brought me back to consciousness. The great door of the house had opened, and a flood of light streamed out. Into the night, with a babel of noise, snatches of song, mad laughter, and ribald jest, came by twos and threes a company that plainly had been making the hours memorable. There were, all told, seven or eight officers, gay in uniform and trebly gay from their potations, and as many women, in attire that marked their caste, and all more or less disheveled.

The longer I live, the more I am convinced that the abandoned laughter of women in liquor is the most hellish sound in the world. There is some diabolical quality in it tears me to the core. The laugh of a drunken man is a tiresome noise, but a woman's is as the sound of an invisible pit.

At last into the the circle of light came the great figure of Dmitri. He was tipsy—as tipsy as a seasoned Russian can get, and that is not much to say, for as a race they are incredibly absorbent. There was no unsteadiness in his speech or gait. He moved with animal ease and precision, but there was a nasty sneer on his face, and when he spoke it was like poison, with words that seared as they fell.

"Come, ladies and gentlemen!" he rasped. "Will you not make your *adieux*

to the hostess? She is desolated at your departure!"

The company laughed loudly at this sally. Dmitri was a fine spirit. A second later he half led, half dragged, into the light the most beautiful girl I think I have ever seen—tall, fair, and oval-faced, with a wealth of brown hair and the melting eyes which have made the Georgian women a synonym for loveliness through all the lands of the East—to their sorrow.

It was a pitiless travesty. The girl was fainting on her feet. As he pulled her roughly to the doorway, the brute steadied her and thrust up her chin to make her look that crowd of inquisitors in the face.

I heard a choking, animal sound at my elbow. The situation flashed clear in an instant. This, then, was poor old Davidoff's "little Sonia"! God pity her, indeed, with her child heart broken and soiled, and all the days of her life poisoned with the knowledge of loss and shame!

How quickly the brain can telegraph a mandate to the members of the body I am not scientist enough to know; but simultaneously with the thought, it seemed to me, I was upon him. By good chance, as Davidoff started to spring to his feet, my hand found his lips, and the shriek he strove to utter was smothered in his beard. I am strong enough, if need be, and I held the old man motionless, despite his wild struggling.

"Be still, you old fool! Do you want her killed?" I whispered.

Davidoff fell back on the ground. The noise of our encounter must have been heard, if the clamor that hailed Dmitri's invitation had not drowned it in ears tuned only to the noble sport in which they were engaged.

One after another, the wretches minced forward and saluted the girl's limp, helpless hand, which Dmitri held up to them. Then, with scurrilous speeches and shrieks of self-approving laughter, they passed out into the drive. The half drunken women were lifted bodily into waiting carriages and whirled away, crying out loud and shameless messages of farewell. From their words I gleaned that the officers were bound that night for St. Petersburg.

When the miserable show was over, Dmitri thrust the girl into the arms of a woman who stood behind him, calmly lit a cigarette, and went with his cronies, clanking and swaggering and urging haste, down the

long walk to where the horses waited. A minute later I heard the clatter of hoofs on the highway, growing fainter and fainter; and at last all was still.

V

DAVIDOFF lay like one dead. I had to rouse him when the door opened again and the gray-haired woman signaled to us. He had known well enough what fate had overtaken the girl, but face to face with it, after the first spasm of rage, he had collapsed. The man was only mechanically alive. His heart and courage seemed to have died within him at the moment of his surrender, and it required some urging to make him get up and follow me into the house.

The place was furnished richly, but in flamboyant taste. The woman, who had once been comely, bore across her face a great abrasion with discolored edges—the mark, I was to learn, of Dmitri's discipline. She conducted us through the spacious hall, carpeted with the rarest of rugs and hung with splendid tapestries, into a dining room decorated in black and gold and scarlet.

The room was littered with the debris of the feast, and reeked with the mingled odors of wine, tobacco, and the exotic perfumes worn by the creatures who had just left it. All was in dire disorder. Pillows were thrown hither and yon. A carved chair, overturned and broken, had been thrust into one corner. Long, gold-tipped Russian cigarettes, from a box upset on the table, were scattered and trodden over the floor. Great clusters of long-stemmed roses lay, withered, pathetic, and forgotten, among the plate and the plundered bottles.

The place told its own story. Hanging forlornly from the great chandelier was a white toy lamb, conspicuous in its symbolism, and sowed over table, chairs, and carpet everywhere lay rice, eloquent of the final insult. For those who could conceive such wicked cruelty as this, I thought, as I looked about me, there must be a deeper and hotter hereafter.

At the far end of the room, on a great divan covered with Venetian velvet, lay the girl. At first I thought she was dead. The collar of her simple gown was turned back from her gleaming throat, and her long, dark lashes showed black against the stony pallor of her face.

Davidoff moved toward her like a man in a trance. He reverently took off his cap and stood with it clasped in his hands, with

the awed, emotionless look one sees in the faces of those who stand in the presence of death. He made no sound, gave no sign of recognition.

Still as it was in the room, our presence seemed to rouse the girl. She started up with a frightened cry. The gray woman put an arm about her.

"Peace, little one! There is nothing to fear any longer."

"Ah!" she moaned, like a child that has been disturbed by an evil dream. "I thought he had come back!"

She sank down again on the gorgeous cushions. Something stirred at last in the dormant consciousness of Davidoff. His vacant old face lighted up, and he fell on his knees before the divan with a crooning cry.

"Sonia, Sonia! Look up, my flower!"

The girl sprang up at the sound of his voice.

"Oh, God is good!" she cried.

She fell forward with her arms wrapped tight about him, her fair face pressed close against his seamed and bearded one. She patted and smoothed his gray head, and passed her white hand over his brows, as if to make sure of him.

The old man held her to him, talking softly, like a mother to a hurt babe. With her face hidden on his shoulder, she sobbed out the story of her life's shipwreck.

"Men came to the door at night," she faltered. "They said they were of the police, and showed me a great paper. They put me into a carriage. I knew nothing till I awoke in this place, and when I asked them to send for you they laughed. And then—oh, my father, I cannot tell it! It is terrible!"

"Sorrow no more, my sunlight. We will go home."

"But, my father, I cannot go home shamed and blackened! I cannot look up into the sky again. The birds and the flowers and everything that is pure and good will turn away from me. You must hide me, father, where none can see me, till I die!"

I knew then that old Davidoff, whether weak or strong by the measure of men, was cast in the image of his Maker. He took her white, tear-stained face between his bony hands and looked into her eyes with infinite compassion.

"You are my daughter," he said gently. "Nothing can change that."

"And mine!" spoke the gray woman. It was almost the first word she had spoken. "You do not know me, Andrieff!"

Davidoff's mind was drifting back into the shadows. I could see the light fading from his face, even in this solemn moment of reunion, as the sunlight fades from a clouded sky.

Sonia stared up at the woman with eyes of wonder.

"You? You?" she questioned. "Are you my own mother?"

"I am what the cruelty of the Barzanski has left of her," she answered.

"Then that is why—oh, father, she was so kind to me! Now I understand. She fought for me—"

"Say no more, child. He would not understand, and it is past now."

"But my mother—"

"Mother!" echoed Davidoff blankly, as the truth filtered into his understanding.

"Yes—oh, yes!" He stretched out a hesitant hand to her. "I have missed you, Pavlowa! But no, what you say is right—I do not understand. There is so much to understand!"

"Never mind, Andrieff; it is better so."

Her voice was hard and colorless, her bruised face set in a mask of renunciation.

"Yes," the old man repeated, parrotlike, "it is better so. All will be well now that I have you. We must go home. It is late."

In the moment of revelation he sat in darkness. The truth passed him by without recognition. To him it all meant nothing. The stain and the heartache and the loneliness which had made his life a ruin were all taken away by the merciful touch of a divine amnesia. He rose and looked foolishly about him.

"I do not know this place," he said. "We must go home. Come, my children—and you, sir; you are coming with us."

He showed no trace of interest in the house and all that it meant; but as he stared here and there in a sort of vacant curiosity, his eye fell for the first time on the wilderness of bottles that littered the table. Instantly he became again the wine merchant. Stepping briskly forward, he picked up a bottle and in a casual voice read the mark aloud.

"Barzanski! Ah, there is no wine like the Barzanski! I had it once, but I remember—no, somehow it has escaped me. What was it, now, about this Barzanski?

There was a—no, it is no use. It has gone from me."

His mind was groping in the darkness, but the old habit of his calling was strong. Some wine remained in the bottle that he had picked up. Selecting an empty glass, he filled it, smelled at it critically, tasted, then tossed it off. A smile of recognition came into his face.

"Oh, yes!" He nodded. "That seems to be the '74. But," he went on, with a puzzled expression, as he scanned the great number of the bottles, "how is this? Who can have the Barzanski? There, that is it—the thing that I cannot remember. Let me think!"

It was pitiful to watch him, peering into the darkness of his broken memory for some landmark of recollection.

Of a sudden the whole situation flashed on me. I went cold with the shock of it. Dmitri, with all his sins upon him, was in that minute at the mercy of this doddering old man. Siberia was hanging over his haughty head, on the tenuous thread of a madman's vagrant memory.

In spite of the disquisitions I have heard in Paris, I do not know whether there is actually any such thing as thought transference; but something, though I am inclined to believe it was less telepathy than the brimming glass of Barzanski he had just swallowed, rolled back the cloud that obscured Davidoff's mental vision. While I was looking, he clutched the bottle with both hands, shook it before him, patted it, and finally thrust it into the capacious pocket of his long coat. A gleam of insane purpose and cunning came into his eyes, and he burst into a peal of crazy laughter, dancing up and down in glee.

"God, I thank Thee!" he screamed, shaking his lean hands in air. "Now we shall see who goes to Siberia!"

One after another, he took up the bottles and read the labels.

"Barzanski, Barzanski—all, all Barzanski," he chuckled, as he passed swiftly from one side of the table to the other. "There is enough here to wash out all my wrongs. All Barzanski, every one!"

I pressed close behind him. Here were bottles and bottles, with the mocking label I had come so far to find, impudently staring me in the face. Eagerly, I admit, and perhaps with some nervous haste, I tried them one and all. By all that is good, they had been drained to the last drop! A fool

for luck! Davidoff had drawn the capital prize; every other bottle was empty.

I felt cold and weak and aged. I must also confess to a sense of injustice. I was worn by the night's ordeal. To have found one bottle untouched, or even half full, would not have been too much to hope for; but the Russians are thorough drinkers. The great oaken sideboard, as well, was bare as a pauper's cupboard.

As for Davidoff, he was prattling of revenge, but already his purpose was beginning to dissolve in foolish impulse.

"Come, Pavlowa! Come, my Sonia, my sunlight! We must hurry. Let us leave this place. The air here is poisoned. Let us go home, and make a fire, and live again around our table, and pray to our own icons. We shall decide then what is to be done. Ha, the great Barzanski, with his gold lace, the robber of women! How will he look with his head shaved? Good God, the very dogs will—"

Davidoff's wife watched him with eyes to which the bitterness of life had given clear vision. From that moment hers was the master mind, while the poor old man became a marionette, moving by her will.

"Hark you, Andrieff," she said. "The child is not fit to go. It is too long a journey, and she is broken. For me, I am the trusted slave, and I am mistress here. Dmitri thinks one beating will keep me submissive. He has not had a new idea for ten centuries. Through five thousand miserable nights I have watched the hours under this foul roof. One more cannot hurt me. There is no one within half a league. Go home, then; sleep and rest. To-morrow you shall have sweeter work than measuring liters of wine. You must have your wits about you. He is on his way to Europe. Before he comes again, we will have the doors torn from his bird cage, and the walls will have no more echoes. There is guilt enough in them to bury the Barzanski a mile deep. I am the one who knows. Leave it to me. I told Alexis, when the breath was going out of him, that I would visit his sins on those who came after him, with the same mercy that he showed to me. Now the time has come. Princes!" she cried. "Nay, beggars! I will not leave this pig so much as a coat to shield him from the snow!"

"Yes, yes—you have suffered," she threw at Davidoff. She was fairly livid. Her great eyes were like coals in the white-

ness of her scarred face. "You have suffered in the dark, like a wounded rabbit. Now be a Georgian. These rulers forbid you arms and cartridges. You have forgotten how to kill, but you have a tongue. Use it! Shame? Don't stop to think of the shame. It will only make the greater coward of you. Have the Barzanski ever stopped for shame? I am the one that is shamed. I have no rag of reputation left, and before I finish every peddler in Russia shall know it. I will finish what the Romanoff began. I will make the blood of the Barzanski pay me and mine to the last kopeck. Their name shall be a byword. The women of the old race have been their playthings. I am of the line of Schamyl. Go home, Andrieff, but if you have a spark of courage left do not dawdle by the fire or mumble to the icons or shed any more stupid tears. Sleep, and eat, and pull your shaky brains together, and bring me the police in the morning!"

Davidoff listened with open mouth. When she had finished, he turned without a word and started for the door. Only once on the long journey into the city did he speak.

"She has changed a great deal," he said.

To this day I do not know who Mme. Davidoff was before her marriage, but I felt that night that in changing her name she made substantial concessions.

VI

As I walked into the Londres in the gray of the morning, just as the sleepy housemen, with weighted polishing implements attached to their feet, were skating over the heavily waxed floors to lend them luster for the day, I reflected that I was showing scant courtesy to old John Sanborn, to go all this time without looking him up.

And then it came to me. All this time? Why, man alive, I had been in Tiflis a matter of twelve hours only; but they had indeed been full ones.

For me, whose habit it was to go every night in the year to the Café des Cygnes and help drink three bottles of wine, this whirlwind episode was little short of riotous, a very nightmare of adventure. Seldom did I vary half an hour in arriving before my own keyhole in the Rue des Pèlerins, usually in the placid state of contentment which reasonable indulgence can give; but here I was rolling in at dawn, like the wildest of gallants, tingling from

my part in the most thrilling social drama in Russia, hollow for food, heavy-eyed for sleep, and, to tell truth, craving the fillip of good wine as I had never thought to do in all my life.

It had been a fabulous twelve hours, and the play was only begun. I hated the thought of going to bed. By Jove, I wouldn't do it! A bath, fresh clothing, some breakfast—which they do well in Russia—and I should do for another day. I would be a devil of a fellow for once. There never would be better warrant, and I should have something of a tale to tell, you may wager, when again I dropped in, as if out of the blue, on that humdrum company of tipplers in the *Café des Cygnes*.

But I must take time to find John Sanborn, even if the whole nobility of Russia were packed off to Siberia without my help. A man may better lose his money or his life than a loyal friend, and John Sanborn was more than that.

When I entered the office of the hotel, whom in all the world should I see, stretched in a great armchair against the wall, smoking quietly, imperturbable as ever, but John himself?

"Well, old *Falstaff*!" he grinned. "Was it a wild night?"

"John," I gasped, "I haven't been out all night before since sophomore year. But what in the dickens are you doing here?"

"Looking up a vagrant American," he answered. "You know they keep tab on folks over here, and you've got the Russian police running around in rings. They've lost you, and half a dozen perfectly good gumshoe men are likely to lose their jobs in the morning if I don't produce you in the flesh. I just stuck around here. I knew you always had sense enough to come home after you'd had your three bottles!"

"John," I blurted, "I only had one. The others were all gone."

I thought he was going to fall off his chair with laughter, though it seemed to me a perfectly simple statement of fact.

"That must have been the only reason," he roared. "But they're still turning it out. Freshen yourself up, and we'll see what can be done. You've got a lot of reporting to do, and you'll need a wet whistle, bless your vinous old soul!"

When I came down to the dining room, half an hour later, there he sat, with everything all shipshape, and the waiter just coming in with the best breakfast I ever

washed down in my life. It's wonderful what they can do with these little Black Sea crayfish and eggs and things.

"Well, Pruney," said John, "tell me all about it. You've got to, anyway, because I'm consul of the good old U. S. A. here, and I'm responsible for all you wandering sheep."

"Consul!" I repeated. "I thought you were in the oil business."

"Of course," he smiled; "that's what consuls in the Caucasus are for. But never mind that. What the deuce have you been up to?"

"Where shall I begin?"

"At the beginning, of course."

"Well, I left Paris about four days ago, I guess it was, looking for a bottle of wine."

"Great Scott, Pruney, has Paris gone dry?"

"Not enough to make it unpopular, but I was looking for Barzanski."

His face hardened at the name, and he looked out of the window. As he sat there in the searching morning light, it seemed to me that there was a change in him.

"And you spent the night trying to get it? Where?"

"I began trying in Moscow. I tried all the way, including this tavern, where the gentle Prince Dmitri heard me crying for it, and tried to glare me to death. Then I wandered out and tackled an old Georgian in a shop on the other side of the river. I spent the last half of the night with him at Dmitri's private harem, somewhere out in the new development. Part of the time I lay on the ground in the walled garden, holding my breath, dying slowly but surely of thirst, and watching Dmitri and his spifflicated friends of both sexes. The other part I passed in the house, trying to resuscitate the wine merchant's daughter, who is Dmitri's latest victim. Dmitri is a pretty piece of work. Do you know him?"

John Sanborn's face was a study. He paid no heed to my question, but said, more to himself than to me:

"How long will a just God let that creature live?"

"You do know him, then?"

John looked at me steadily for a space.

"Jason," he said—and when John Sanborn didn't call me "Pruney," it was no time to jest—"Jason, I'm glad you've come here. I can say a few things to you. I know enough about Dmitri to send him to the mines for the rest of his miserable life,

but—Jason, I was engaged to marry the woman who is now that man's wife. Do you understand?"

I couldn't forbear a whistle. It was all clear now. What I had seen and heard during the preceding hours came back to me. I knew what the change in him meant.

"Does she know?" I asked at last.

"Is there any one in Russia who doesn't know?" he shot back. "I should say she did know. His mistresses have rather the better of it. He takes them to call on her, and that's only a small part of it."

"Have you ever seen her since?"

He colored.

"Once, when I thought she needed a hand about as badly as any woman ever could. I lost my head a bit, I think."

"And then?"

"She was perfectly adorable. She looked me straight in the eye and told me she was perfectly happy. She's going to game it out."

"John," I said after a while, "is Dmitri killable?"

"For everybody but me. I love his wife."

"Still?"

"Always, and so much that I'd rather be broken on the wheel than have a breath of scandal come near her."

"John, Dmitri left a few hours ago for St. Petersburg. When he comes back, he's going to take a trip in another direction, if that'll cheer you up any."

"Meaning what?"

"Well, it might mean several things. The first is that he's probably going to Siberia."

Sanborn drew his chair back from the table.

"Jason, this isn't a joking matter."

"Not for Dmitri. First, there's a decent wine merchant who has gone stark, staring, Barzanski mad over the rotten things the Barzanski breed has done to him. Second, and more important, there's the wine merchant's wife, who's a little bit saner than you and I put together, and three times as—"

"There are a thousand people who hate Dmitri with good reason, and who dare not say a word."

"You don't quite get it. The wine merchant's wife was stolen by old Alexis, Dmitri's father, and has lived for twenty years in the place where we spent the night. When Dmitri's merry men brought her own

daughter there, the fur began to fly. The mother fought, Dmitri beat her like the thoroughbred he is, and she proceeded to loosen the lid."

"I know. That sort of thing is Dmitri's daily food. It will end in nothing, as usual."

"It will end in Siberia—don't forget that. This woman is no weeping Mabel. She's a brand out of the pit, I tell you. She says she's a descendant of Schamyl, and I believe it, whether he had any or not. She promised old Alexis, on his deathbed, just to keep him cheerful where he was going, that she'd collect from his posterity, and the girl was the spark in the tinder. Don't guess wrong about this lady. She's just plain cordite. She's sent the old husband to fetch the police there this morning, and I wouldn't miss it for all the cellars in France. By the way, I told you I came here hunting the wine of Barzanski. Do you know the story of that beverage?"

"Naturally."

"Well, Dmitri and his valiant crew punished fifty-nine bottles of it last night, and left the bottles and the woman to prove it. Besides—"

"Besides what?"

"Every confounded bottle was absolutely empty!"

"Jason," said John, with a great grin, "he's a greater villain than I know. It's death he deserves, not deportation."

"That's the way I feel about it."

VII

WHEN we climbed the stairs that led to the bureau of police, and were ushered into the anteroom, there, crouched in a chair among a motley assortment of waiting people, sat Davidoff. He looked older and grayer than I had thought him, but was noticeably calm and normal as he rose and greeted me decorously.

John passed on. Tactful and far-sighted as always, he avoided even the appearance of having aught to do with the agents of Dmitri's retribution. That was John Sanborn over again. His habit of thought and his code of conduct had not changed a particle since, as cattlemen's sons, we had first met and made friends on the mesquite ranges of southern Texas, and a great deal of water had run under the bridges since then.

At an immediate summons I followed into the inner office of the superintendent

of police, Mr. Belineff, an imposing person of the old school, bearing the unmistakable military stamp, and covered with years, medals, and a patriarchal beard.

"This, your excellency," said John, smiling, "is Mr. Hunter, the American who caused your department some anxiety last night. Mr. Hunter is an old and dear friend of mine, and I can vouch for him in every way. You may place implicit confidence in any information he may give regarding his movements. He will be my guest here, and I shall be very much honored if you can find it convenient to pass a night with us some time during his stay. We still have a fire in the kitchen and a glass on the board."

I learned in due time that Sanborn's cook had been lured away from the grand duke, and that his dinners were the envy of every *gourmet* in the Caucasus; but neither I nor my old friend could have foreseen that this hospitable invitation was to play its part in the strange sequence of circumstances that wove themselves into the drama of Barzanski. None the less, it mellowed the official heart of M. Belineff as nothing else could have done, and it was a beaming official in whose presence John left me to give an account of myself.

The story of my wild-goose chase after a bottle of wine seemed to touch a sympathetic chord in the old gentleman's highly decorated breast.

"If," I said, "your excellency could know the nightly ritual of the Café des Cygnes, in the Rue des Caçons Verts, in Paris, you would understand the spirit of my journey and the unselfish devotion which has prompted me to seek this paragon of wines wherever hope led."

He listened with a grim and quizzical grin.

"If the story of the man Davidoff is to be credited," he said, "your sacred mission led you a merry dance last night."

"Well, there certainly was nothing stereotyped about it. I moved in what might be called a Barzanski atmosphere, but aside from a residual aroma there was very little left to quench the thirst. My scientific knowledge is just where it was yesterday morning."

The old man laughed outright.

"Except," he said, "for a chance to observe its stimulant qualities, eh?"

"Your excellency, I made careful notes of its effect on Mr. Davidoff, while I stood

watching him drink the very last drop that was left."

"You seem to be confirming Davidoff's story in a remarkable manner. Knowing his mental condition, I was inclined to believe that he dreamed it."

"Davidoff, sir, I believe to be a good man deeply wronged. His misfortunes have no doubt disturbed his faculties, but a man who can put the year to a vintage at a single swallow must have a deal of wit left."

With that he called the wine merchant into the room. Being a bachelor, I had never realized before the singular posthypnotic power of woman. Last night I would have sworn in any court that Davidoff was crazy; but the vitriolic handling his wife had administered in the gray hours of the morning seemed to have straightened every kink in his mental threads. The tale he told of his misfortunes, and of the adventures of the night, was as clear and forceful as a lawyer's opening, without a flurry of excitement or a trace of vagary.

"And the proof of these statements," he concluded, "with much more that is not within my knowledge, is at your excellency's disposal. My wife is waiting at this moment to make these disclosures."

Davidoff had taught me much concerning matrimony.

Half an hour later we were speeding in a well appointed carriage along the road which the old man and I had traveled in such doubt and perturbation during the dark, lonely hours of the night. It was all like a tangled dream to me that morning. Even yet I can think of the whole thing only as a fantastic play into which I was cast by some strange caprice of fortune.

Here was I, a person of quiet tendencies, dashing about in a strange and more or less savage land with people, great and small, of whom a week ago, in the quiet of the Cygnes, I had not even dreamed. The thing had simply no explanation in reason. I had no wild ambition for adventure, or for much else. My fondest wish had been that the Lafitte might last till I could no longer swallow. With that comfortable prospect fairly assured, I had taken the precaution to secure for myself a plot in a little cemetery outside Paris, which appealed to me as a quiet and restful place into which to graduate.

Then this provoking vision of Barzanski had come into my life, and the pursuit of it had landed me in the very foreground of

an incredible picture—setting out with a great luminary of police, backed by all the authority of imperial Russia, to help topple over an ancient house, which now in the person of its hereditary chief was about to pass into the shadows. Most inexplicable of all, my oldest and best friend, John Sanborn, after years of separation, had bobbed up as a big figure in the same picture.

I could not sense it at all. It was surely a long step from the Rio Grande to the unruly heart of the Caucasus! Davidoff was right when he said that life was a strange pudding.

M. Belineff held animated conversation with himself all the way, with very little assistance from me, though I tried at intervals to save him from monologue. Subconsciously, with the Barzanski episode as a text, I was reading myself a homily on the vanity of human endeavor. On the whole, I was well satisfied that I had been content to walk the quiet ways of the world and not wear out my days with the tortures of high ambition. All about me, not alone in this amazing muddle of Davidoff and Barzanski, but in this strange land and its turbulent history, in the scenes through which we were passing, I read the same lesson.

Away beyond us towered the mountain, with the hoary ruins of its castle, almost as old as time, and the white church of St. Andrew gleaming out on the eternal background of gray rock against which it seemed to cling. In this rugged theater of the Caucasus, what a panorama there had been of hope and struggle, of war and torture and princely display, and how little was left of it now!

Where were all the women, all the jewels, the vessels of gold and silver? Where were the vanished races of men, the cities, the armed hosts, the horses and camels and chariots of war? Where were the music and the dancing, the drinking and the loving, and the loot? Gray time seems to sit in the crumbling stronghold on the mountain top and watch them come and go.

When Texas was a silence, these Barzanski were climbing the ladder of their noisy age, building themselves up by war and rapine and violence; and now—new world, new standards. The pot boils, the bubbles rise, and in a little space they burst and vanish.

The old house, nestling among its noble trees, was beautiful in the morning light.

As our carriage swept up to the door, the high-strung Russian coachers surging at the bit, and the gendarmes trotting squarely along behind on their rangy Hungarians, Davidoff and I both looked down at the spot in the bushes where we had lain hidden the night before, and exchanged reminiscent glances.

There was no sign of life about the place, but as we mounted the step the door opened, as if of its own accord; and it closed behind us when we had entered the great hall. Nothing had been disturbed. The shutters were still tight closed; the lights burned everywhere. The wild confusion of the night had been left as it was when Dmitri rode away.

From a door cut in the heavy paneling came the wife of Davidoff. Her black gown, severe in its simplicity, made a somber note in this place of many memories. At her side was Sonia, white and frightened, still shining like a fair jewel.

"You are of the police, sir," said the older woman. "I am at your disposition."

There was undeniable stateliness in her poise. Outwardly so cold, she was to me, after the revelation of the preceding night, a burning Nemesis and an angel of irrevocable judgment.

"You are the wife of this Davidoff?" asked the official.

"By sanction of law and the offices of Holy Church," she answered. "By right of might and crime, and lack of all human pity, I have been for twenty years the mistress of Alexis Barzanski and the servant of his son."

"And your husband thought you dead?"

"With reason. I have been bound by the silence of these walls for half a lifetime, guarded until my jailer was sure that for shame I would not venture into the sight of decent people. In truth I have been dead—to all but their wickedness. This house has been the hideous theater of my existence. I have seen enough here to turn a heart to stone. When my own daughter was brought here for sacrifice, I decided that the time had come for reckoning. If any one wishes now to shield the Barzanski, he must bury me in the deepest grave in Russia!"

Belineff raised his head and looked at her. She met his gaze without the movement of a muscle.

"You speak of Prince Dmitri as disloyal?"

"There is the proof!"

She pointed to a picture that had been turned with its face to the wall. At a sign, a gendarme stepped forward and reversed it. It was a superb portrait of the Czar.

"When was this done?"

"When his majesty confiscated the Barzanski estates."

"What other evidence have you?"

"Will you be so good as to come with me, sir?"

She led the way into the long dining room, where the table still stood untouched, with all its wreckage.

"Last night, sir, all these bottles contained the prohibited wine of Barzanski."

"Who drank it?"

"Dmitri and his friends, and half a dozen drabs of the city, whom he had brought here for a farewell party, to celebrate his conquest of this child."

"Are you sure," he inquired, with a flicker of a smile, "that this gentleman"—indicating me—"got none of it? I understand that he came from Paris solely for that purpose."

The woman surveyed my modest stature.

"He should have hastened," she replied.

"Who finds wine left when Dmitri has passed?"

"Do I understand, madam," the official questioned, "that your daughter was brought here by force?"

She answered slowly, and with venomous distinctness:

"She was brought here by order of your excellency, as an anarchist—just as I was by the elder Barzanski, two years after she was born."

"By my order?" he cried sternly.

"What do you mean?"

"So the man said who did the work."

"This," he raged, "is unspeakable!"

"This, sir, is the Barzanski."

"But the wine?" he demanded. "Is there more of it hidden here?"

"Four hundred thousand bottles, sir; and I do not know how much in wood. No one went near the wine save Dmitri himself. It was his boast that he would have Barzanski wine to drink on the day when the Czar was buried, to speed his majesty to eternity."

I am convinced that it is only the part of wisdom, after thirty, to have one's heart examined from time to time by a specialist. The shock which this announcement gave me showed clearly enough that I had over-

estimated my strength. For a moment it was only with the greatest effort that I could breathe.

While I stood gasping, M. Belineff turned to me and smiled broadly—a message of encouragement which reminded me that now was an ill time to be ailing.

"Where are these stores?" he asked.

I was recovering my faculties rapidly as she answered:

"If you will follow me, I will show you."

VIII

TAKING a candle from the table—I seizing another to lend what assistance I might—Mme. Davidoff led the way through the still, gloomy house, the light making grotesque shadows as we went, and down a winding stair into the cellar. Hope burned high in me. My palate tingled at the thought of those incredible ranks of priceless bottles.

Reaching the foot of the stair, we looked about. The place was full of suggestive shadows, but innocent as a church of bottle or demijohn or cask, of butt or barrel, puncheon or hogshead. It was innocent of any conceivable thing that might contain a mouthful of this ghostly Barzanski. It was bare as my hand.

M. Belineff himself remarked it.

"I see no wine here, madam," he said.

"It is behind that wall, sir—which, as you will see, follows the line of this part of the house. Dmitri had it built. He told me it was four feet thick. The cellar behind it is cut out of the solid rock."

It was a stubborn obstacle, but I did not lose heart. That after all my vicissitudes I should at last get into the same house with four hundred thousand bottles of Barzanski, not to mention an unstated quantity in wood, and then go away without knowing the taste of the stuff—who could think it possible?

"Do you know the workman who built this wall?" asked the official.

"I did, sir," she smiled. "He was taken violently ill an hour after he had finished, and died shortly after that."

"And this is the twentieth century!"

"The Barzanski do not belong to the twentieth century, sir. They have the veneer of it—that is all."

"This wall has no door, so far as I can see," said M. Belineff. "It seems to be solid."

A cold feeling ran over me. Perhaps it

was the chill of the cellar. I was listening intently for her reply.

"That is Dmitri's fourteenth-century ingenuity," she said. "There is a pivot door somewhere, but only he has the trick of it."

I was traveling a dreary road, lighted with rosy hopes, but paved thick with disappointment. At that moment I believed all the evil they told of this Dmitri. I could see now what a cold-hearted wretch he was. The fondest hopes and longings were nothing to him. He was simply a monster of selfishness.

I felt all over the wall, with my heart beating so rapidly that it made my throat ache; but even with my reading glasses I could find no crevice where the mortar was not firm and hard. To think that behind this stupid face of rough masonry there lay that limitless paradise of sensation, and that one self-centered creature could lay it wide with a touch of his finger!

Furtively, when M. Belineff was not looking, I set my shoulder against the stones and pushed till my heart seemed bursting. If I overtaxed myself, it was a desperate need; but I might as well have tried to shove the Pyramids around Egypt.

While I was trying to hide the panting which my effort had caused, a large gendarme stepped forward and fastened on the wall, along its entire length, the imperial seals of Russia. It was now a purely personal matter between the Czar and myself. The thing became more complicated with every minute.

Then we retraced our way, slowly and—for me—sadly, up the winding stair, and back to the ghastly array of empty and mocking bottles. I was sick at heart.

While we were in the house, another carriage had been brought, and more men of the gendarmerie. When we had finished the inquiry, M. Belineff asked if there were any servants left in the place.

"No longer, sir," answered the woman. "I have sent them away."

"But who is to set the house in order?"

"No one. It should stand as it is, until it falls of its own rottenness."

"It is your purpose, then, to return to your husband?"

"It is my purpose," she said, "to learn if there is one law in Russia for great and little alike, and to look once more at Dmitri, so that he may know I have kept my word."

"And have you more to tell?"

"I have told nothing." For the first time her voice rose above its level of restraint. "Listen to me!" she said. "I could tell a story so black that you, hardened as you are to the misery of life, could not look me in the face and hear it. What would it avail? Nothing. For my own sorrows, they are past. Life can give me only one thing. Mother, daughter—sacred names!—what are we? Outcasts, the used and discarded toys of a lord. I have been the old man's strumpet and the young one's slave. I have made their sport and borne their insults and their blows. I will take my pay in only one coin—the life and the honor of their race!

"Wife? I am fit to be no man's wife. To me Davidoff is a child, but in faith and kindness and uprightness he is a god. When I shall have closed the vile book of the Barzanski, I will be this man's servant so long as my hands can labor. Poor though he is, and simple though he is, I shall have an honorable master. That is all I ask. Till my task is finished, I shall be at your call. If justice is done, you will have no trouble to find me; but if it fails, your excellency, the hills are high, and you, whose finger has been on the pulse of the Caucasus for thirty years, know well enough that the race of Schamyl is not dead. May we go, your excellency? I have done my part. The rest remains with you."

She started to extinguish the lights, but stopped.

"No," she said simply. "Let them die their own death. I will not spoil the picture."

So she led the way to the door, swung it open, and waited while we filed out into the sunshine. I felt as I did once on coming out of the catacombs in Palermo, leaving the unsightly and shriveled dead of the far past behind me.

She closed the door, locked it, and handed the key to the officer.

"You are Russia, sir," she said.

She walked to the carriage, with the girl and old Davidoff following, bowed and silent. Already the gendarmes were fixing the imperial seals on the doors and windows. The "bird cage" of Barzanski stood like a house of pestilence in the bright noon-day sun, peopled only with its ghosts.

Only once did that singular woman turn to look back on the grave of her youth, her beauty, her virtue, and her hopes. So long

as I live I hope never to see such a look again on a human face.

Like a bridal company we rolled along the broad highway leading into the town. That night the telegraph wires bore to the minister of war in St. Petersburg a coded message summoning Dmitri Barzanski back to Tiflis.

I saw him only once more before the end came, and that was a sight to remember. He came riding through the town in the bright gold of the fall afternoon, on a great black stallion, shining like polished ebony, with neck and sides flecked with gout of foam. Dmitri may have been bad; I have small doubt of it. But at that moment he was an incomparable picture of soldierly bearing and pride of race. It was hard for me to believe, as he went bowing and saluting down the street, with that satin-sided devil of a horse fighting him at every step of the way, that here was a man staring a lifetime of disgrace and servitude in the face, as I happened to know he was.

It was plain enough to me that this was his last ride as a free man, and he was riding alone, with all the grace and audacity and recklessness of his breed. Given a band of music and a mile of war-worn soldiery at his back and he might have been a homecoming hero, receiving a nation's idolatry. I would have given anything I possessed at that minute to have been able to look behind his smile and see what thoughts dwelt there.

While I watched him, pondering in my own fashion on the pity of it, some one plucked me by the sleeve. It was Davidoff. An uncanny smile twisted his face, his eyes held a wild illumination which told that the tension of these days was fast wearing out the frayed fabric of his reason.

"Just a little while now," he chuckled. "Just a little while; he has been to the police." And so saying he hurried on, to lose no moment of the play in which this was to me, in a way, the most pathetic scene.

It is odd how sentiment can cheat the judgment. I could no more help being sorry for Dmitri than I could have thought him high-minded or even decent. I think really it was the horse that did it. I was born and raised in the saddle, as you might say, and I knew what seat and hands and head it took to handle that brute in such fashion through a city street.

The whole story, with its many facets, engaged my thoughts until I went to sleep

that night, but I knew nothing of the movement of events until the final scene. What went between was hid under the mantle of secrecy that in those days wrapped all the official life of Russia.

IX

I HAD abandoned the shabbiness and clatter of the Londres and gone—much to my delight, and, I think, to his—to pass the time with John Sanborn at his place some distance to the eastward, on the old caravan route that leads south from the railway at Akstafa.

It is hard to outgrow a fondness for the open spaces. While John held with some care to the customs of the country, and was a bit of a nabob for comfort, he persisted in calling the estate his "ranch," and the ménage, by no means a small one, was never, in our intercourse, anything but the "outfit."

The place still was girt by the stout walls which in other times had made it a stronghold of some importance, though in these days the forays that once made defense needful had long ceased, under the thorough Russian system of road patrol. Order in the Caucasus was nevertheless an artificial growth, maintained only by summary discipline. Where the Cossack did not make his rounds, the thrifty highwayman still plied his busy trade, and it was a foolish man who rode abroad without ample means of self-protection.

This lent a little of the flavor of old days to our excursions. When we went to and from the city by carriage, the vehicle bristled with arms till, as I told John, it looked as if we were bound for an old-time political convention in Texas.

We passed a good part of our leisure in the saddle, for game was abundant as I would not have thought possible in so old a country. From time to time John entertained officials and men of business from the city, whom I found to be the best of company. The table left nothing to be wished for, and the cellar would have well borne comparison with that of the Café des Cygnes. In such pleasant environment the nightmare of Barzanski had almost worn from my mind—or, at least, from my nerves.

One Thursday night—for the fact that Friday is the Mohammedan Sabbath made it of minor importance in business—I was glad, after a dull day alone, to see John

come bowling into the compound *en voiture* with M. Belineff, who had come to remain over the week-end. Before and since, I have met many men, but none that I remember more diverting, more amiable, or more agreeably human than this Gorgon of the police. How he had managed, during long tenure of so hard and severe an office, to keep his heart so mellow and his mind so utterly unwarped was a constant source of wonder.

I was sorry when the time came for him to depart, and we three drove away to take the morning train into the city. Recognizing the exactions of his office, neither John nor I referred to the Barzanski affair; and so, when his stay was ended, it was further from my thoughts than ever.

There is always a crowd in the Tiflis station at train time. The mobile multitudes of the East swarm along the iron highway that is their link with the stimulant life of Europe. To watch that hotchpotch, with its coats of many colors and cuts, its astounding array of particolored *mafrashes*, which serve the purpose of trunks in the Orient, and to listen to the jargon of tongues, is to wonder if this discordant world will ever be brought to harmony of thought or custom.

To-day there was more than a crowd. It was a mob, orderly as the Orient goes, but throbbing with some undercurrent of excitement which only one familiar with Eastern life would notice.

As we came along through the station, the faint murmur seemed to grow in volume. There was a distinct set of the human current toward the far end of the inclosure. In another moment, stirred by some sudden impulse, it became a rush, with a growing jangle of voices in all the variations of speech and dialect that make the Caucasus a babel.

I was in the lead of our party, with John following close behind me, while M. Belineff had stopped to speak with an acquaintance a little way in the rear.

"What's all the excitement?" I asked of a hurrying Lesghi who was struggling to elbow his way past me.

"Convicts," he answered, without slackening his pace.

"It's the consignment for Siberia, I suppose," said John Sanborn.

A moment proved that he was right. Almost as he spoke, the head of the sorry procession could be discerned, moving slow-

ly into the station yard. There were men of every type and age and tribal cast—women, too. For the most part these wretched people were undemonstrative; but all, whether laughing or crying or hiding their emotions behind a panoply of silence, were unable to disguise the settled expression of hopelessness that had lodgment at the back of their eyes.

The season had advanced. It was almost winter now. There had been snow, but two days of typical Caucasian sunshine had all but melted it away. Still, there was a raw edge to the air, and the wind blew fiercely, whisking the loose garments of the women to and fro, as they stood with grave and sympathetic faces intently watching the approaching column of the condemned.

Fifth or sixth from the front row, as they came along, with footsteps halted by their chains, I marked a man of gigantic build, narrow-waisted, broad-shouldered, his superb figure proclaiming itself even through the clumsy livery of misfortune. The instant my eyes lighted on him, I felt that it would take more than chains to make him prisoner. He moved erect, haughty, masterful, looking with a falcon's eye straight forward over the heads of his fellows, save for one colossal Dagestani who towered like the gray column of a sandstorm above them all.

And then I knew. I felt the blood surge to my heart. Even with his beard off, and in that unsightly raiment, it was impossible for me not to recognize Dmitri, though many might not have known him.

At the first shock of it I started to step forward and speak to him, but the consciousness that I might have had a hand in his undoing held me back. Then I thought of the gentle Sonia, so heartlessly mocked and tortured in her helplessness, and I drew away, angry with myself. The disloyalty, the infringement of arbitrary law that had brought him here, were the technicalities of this world. It was not an offended government that had brought him to the punishment, but the vengeance of God.

All along the platform were friends and relatives of the prisoners, bearing food and little keepsakes, weeping in spite of their choking efforts to be brave, mourning, complaining, talking of business and family things, cursing, but in undertones, for none knew when his hour might come, and the ears and eyes of the police were everywhere in those unhappy days. There was

none to say good-by to Dmitri. Again, conscious of all he represented in the history of his land, I pitied him, though all the while I reproached myself for it.

He seemed to need no man's pity. In every line of the man, in the surly rebellion of his coal-black eyes, the sullen fire that burned in his set face, there was unbreakable pride and defiance. He rose above his adversity like an eagle above the plain.

Suddenly, at a word of command, the column halted. Swinging round in bravado to return the curious stare of the crowd, Dmitri caught sight of John Sanborn. I do not believe he saw me at all. Like flax, he flashed into flame on the instant. Then he laughed a wicked, welcoming laugh, as if glad to find some fit object for his venom. He wasn't a pretty sight just then.

"So this is the way you get her!" he snarled, not in a loud voice, but in as mean a one as ever came from a man's lips.

This was the first light I had had, save John's statement to me that morning in the Londres, on his rivalry with Dmitri for the hand of her who was now the Princess Barzanski. It was a great light, too, on the difference between the two men.

"You can go to her now," the prisoner sneered on. "They tell me the path is well worn!"

Even to this foul slander John said nothing. It seemed to goad the Russian to madness.

"But I have stopped the sport," he shouted. "Do you hear? She is dead!"

Again he laughed. Big as Dmitri was, I knew that John Sanborn could have broken him with his bare hands, and for an instant I made way, expecting to see him spring on the brute and stop his lying tongue for good.

Then I knew better, as I glanced at the chain that held Dmitri's foot. It was a struggle of souls, and the Russian had none. He was outgamed. He was not proof against the master warfare of silence. The muscles of John's brown face knit, but he never moved or spoke.

It swept Dmitri into a perfect frenzy of rage.

"Ah!" he yelled.

He reached out like a flash and whipped a pistol from the holster of the nearest guard.

"Go with her—"

With the glint of the heavy barrel in the sun, my memory jumped the gulf of twenty years. I could hear the deafening crash of the Winchesters and see the Colts spitting death across the narrow, sunlit street before the city hall in little old Laredo. I could feel the strong arms of big John Sanborn closing on me as I lay beside the curbstone, lifting me up and packing me out alive, while the forty-fours tore the air around him.

Firing from the hip, I shot Dmitri twice. His finger never reached the trigger. He was going down when a guard cut loose at him.

Which shot it was that closed the account—the soldier's or one of mine—I do not know. Dmitri gave one choking cry of angry surprise, threw up his hands, hurling his still loaded weapon far out into the crowd, and fell in a heap on the planking.

There was a sea of blanched faces all around me. The station was in an uproar. Sharp orders rang out above the hubbub, and files of infantry swept in at the double, forcing the shoving, craning, chattering people back.

Charging his way toward us through the press, I saw the tall figure of M. Belineff. I passed over to him my old six gun. It had done the thing it was built to do.

No one laid hand on me. Out of the crowd of Georgians, Persians, Armenians, and all the rest came, swift as a lizard, the weird figure of Davidoff, with his wife close behind him. At last he was raving mad. The climax of his tragedy had snapped the last thread of his reason. He bent over the body of poor Dmitri, bobbing up and down, shaking his clenched fists, screaming curses that fouled the air about him, until the guards seized him and dragged him away. The woman followed, cold and pale and silent.

John Sanborn stood for a moment, as if stupefied, watching the body and the little pool of blood that kept growing on the boards of the platform. Then he clutched my arm.

"Good God, Jason, if the scoundrel told the truth!" he said.

It was a minute's work to get myself paroled by Belineff. Soldier fashion, he shot it out:

"To be held in the custody of the American consul."

And away we sped into the crowded street, John Sanborn sprinting ahead and

shouting to me to hurry. Hailing a cab from the flock that always hovered about the station, he dragged me in after him and urged the frightened driver at mad speed to the residence of Dmitri.

It was all still. There was no answer to our wild ringing. Each second was a separate agony to John. At last he drew back, hurled his great shoulder against the tall oaken door, and, as it yielded, plunged on into the silence of the house.

From room to room we went, I at his heels. We found her at last, half conscious, where Dmitri had left her in his farewell, while the police agents waited below. The marks of his murderous fingers were still red against the whiteness of her throat. Gently John lifted her into a chair.

"Has he—has he gone?" she murmured, and closed her eyes again.

"Yes, he has gone—far."

"I know. He told me—to Siberia."

"No—to the judgment of all his sins."

"Is he—"

She could not say the word. Raising herself, she looked into John's face, waiting.

"Yes, Dmitri is dead!"

X

THREE months later we were dining before the great fireplace at the "ranch"—John, the lady who is now his wife, and I. Winter was wearing on to spring. Won-

derful as it all had been, and happy as I was in the new happiness that had come through so much sorrow to the man who was more than a brother to me, I could hear the glad spring sounds of the Paris streets calling to me, and this was my good-by. The awful business in which all our lives had been so strangely tangled was slipping into the past, and the shadows it had cast were passing like the blackness of a summer storm.

"John," I said, holding my wineglass between my eye and the mellow light of the candle, "I honestly believe that this is the very best wine I ever tasted in all my life!"

"I'm mighty glad to hear you say that, Prune, because I think myself it's the best in the cellar."

"It's the best in anybody's cellar, or I don't know Montrachet from root beer! John, I'd like to take some of this back to those fellows in the Café des Cygnes. They'd canonize you!"

"That's just what you're going to do, Prune. I've been saving ten dozen for you for a long time."

"Ten dozen! Don't bankrupt yourself. You'll never see its like again. Why, John," I said, after another contemplative swallow, "I don't believe that confounded Barzanski was a bit better than this!"

"It can't be, old man," said John. "This is Barzanski—the '74."

THE END

THE POETS' QUEST

WHAT is it that the ardent poets seek
As up and down the world's long lane they rove,
While listening to harps in wind-swept grove
Or gazing fondly on far mountain peak?

Why do they haunt calm brook and quiet creek,
And hearken to the waves in shell-strewn cove,
Or nightly stray, dream shepherds to the drove
In meadows where star voices softly speak?

From poet lyre they strive to draw a tune,
Some bliss-bound, age-forgotten, rhythmic rune,
The murmured cadence of an Eden day,
A melody of beauty and noblesse,
That shall in some sweet, tender, haunting way
Bring back to earth some long-lost loveliness!

Clarence Urmy